

望公太

×
泣夕羅



の02-03-02

望公太

黒き英雄の一撃無双2

H J 文庫

HOBBY
JAPAN

Nozomi Kota Presents
**ONE TURN KILL,
OF THE DARK PARTISAN.**



の02-
03-02

望公太

黒き英雄の一撃無双2

H J 文庫



501

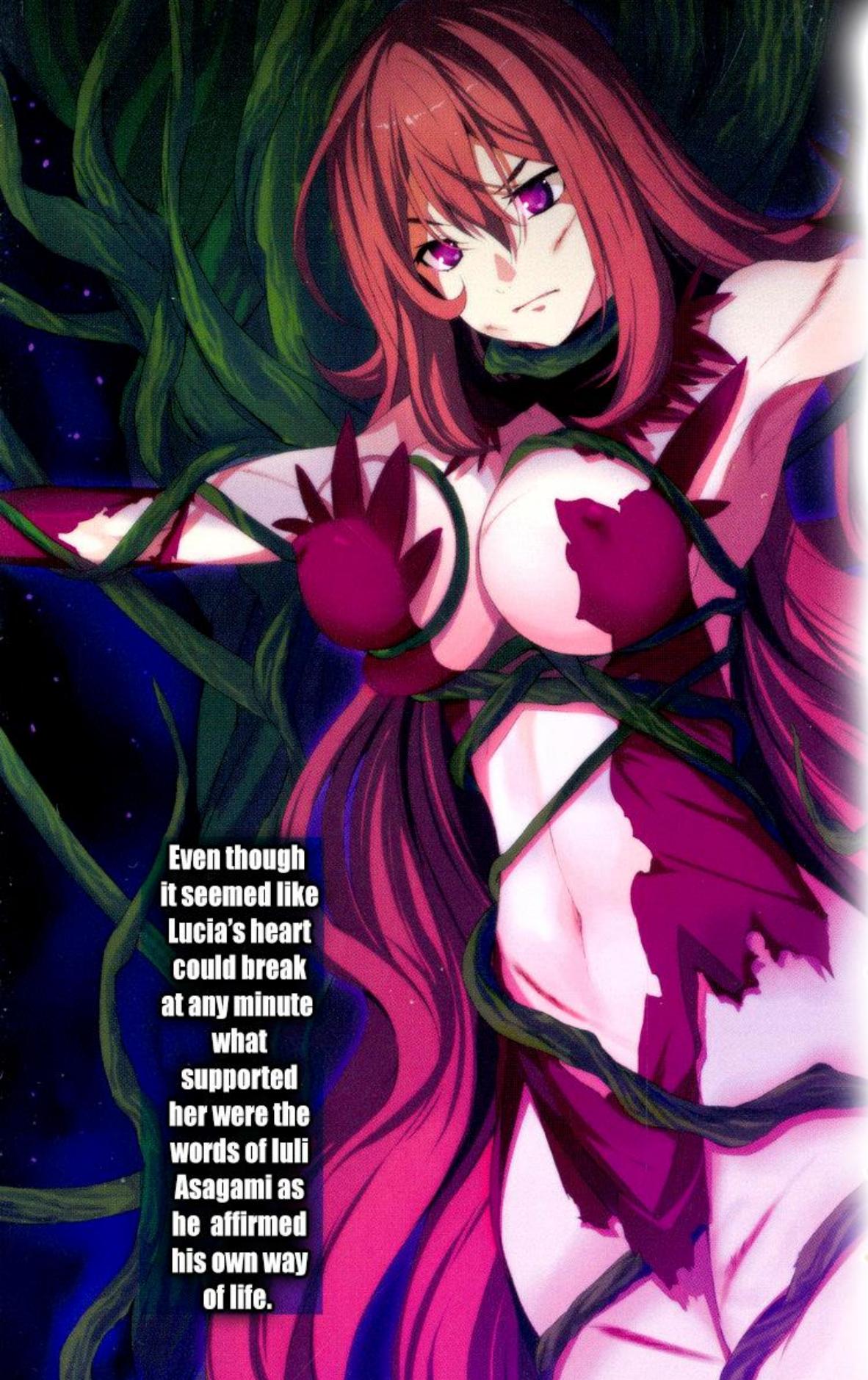
One Turn Kill of the Dark Partisan

2. The Disgraced Witch





"I guess living so I don't have any regrets is nothing but an ideal.. and nobody would be wrong if they said so."



Even though it seemed like Lucia's heart could break at any minute what supported her were the words of Iuli Asagami as he affirmed his own way of life.

Prologue

It was a humble grave. If one climbed the slightly elevated hill one would find a stone slab sticking right out at the top of it. On it was an inscription and right beside it was single flower, the color of the soil around it still looking as though it had just recently been filled in.

It was here that Lucia von Elde Fern stood silently, and with a sorrowful expression on her face as she looked down at the inscription on the gravestone, the wind causing her beautiful hair to sway in the wind. Though the wind in the Demon World reeked of blood and carrion for the most part the wind that blew on this hill smelled faintly of lemon balm and in life her little sister loved this refreshing wind a great deal.

“I will be off then, Melissa,” said Lucia as she finally broke her silence, Speaking as though she were talking to talking to the grave, Melissa. Such was the name inscribed on the name inscribed on the gravestone... and the name of her younger sister.

“I have nothing else left to do here. The fighting’s over for the most part, there’s been a shift in power and I think I did everything I was supposed to do... And well, to be honest, I did all that I could to try and stop it you know. Malta was all up in arms. Honestly, it’s hard being popular,” continued Lucia jokingly and with a bright smile on her face but then let out a brief sigh afterwards.

“From now on I’m going to try living the way I want to,” she added for no matter how much she talked all she was met with was silence. The one buried under the gravestone did not reply at all. However, Lucia could hear her voice. Whenever she closed her eyes she could recall the sound of her younger sister’s voice whenever she wanted.

“Onee-chan, look at all the flowers!”

“Aaah! Oh, Onee-chan, there you go wearing that naughty outfit again!”

“No. I... I’m coming with you, Onee-chan!” To Lucia, her younger sister Melissa was her one and only relative. When she was cast out of her clan she was the only one who went with her. Even when her own parents abandoned her she was the only one who stayed with her. After they had been exiled the two of them depended on one another so as to live in the Demon World that was infested with all manner of man-eating fiends. She could lose everything else but her little sister was the one thing she wanted to protect... But even so...

“I wonder what the Human World is like.”

“Oh woow! You’re so beautiful, Onee-chan! Clothes in the Human World are really cute, huh! I... I want some, too!”

“Wha-?! We-Well it’s not like I can help having a smaller chest than you, Onee-chan!”

“Onee-chan... If I am reincarnated, I-” Lucia’s wine red dress then flapped in the wind as she turned her back on the gravestone, combing her hand through her hair as she looked on ahead with an enchanting gaze.

“I’ll have enough fun for the both of us in the Human World,” said the Witch as she began to walk. She threw away all the power she had trained so hard to get. She threw away all the authority she had gained. All of it she simply threw away but even so she still looked elegant, proud, noble and beautiful.

Chapter 1 – The Innocent Girl’s Morning Ritual

“Here, Iuli, say ‘ahn’.”

“Aaaahn,” went Iuli Asagami with a look of pure bliss on his face. Opening his mouth just as he was told. He opened his mouth wide as he was being spoon fed a scoop of ice cream with whip cream and chocolate sauce on top. However, just as the spoon was an inch away from his mouth, Lucia then pulled the spoon back and put it in her own. Iuli’s face then went from that of pure bliss to one of utter despair.

“Hmmm, delicious,” said Lucia, sporting a mischievous grin as she lapped up some chocolate sauce that was on her.

“Lucia, why you, that’s like the one thing you shouldn’t do.”

“Ahn, oh Iuli-kun, don’t look so heartbroken. I promise I won’t do it again. I won’t, so here, say ‘ahn’.”

“Aaaahn.”

“What are you two doing flirting with each other?!” demanded Yukiha Kudoin, the girl with her black hair in a ponytail sitting right across from him, as she pounded the table.

“Don’t get all bent out of shape over my feeding him. I see you’re just as childish as ever, Yukiha-chan.”

“Be silent,” said Yukiha as she glared at Lucia who, in response, did nothing but shrug her shoulders.

“Buuut, I don’t want to cause trouble for the other customers here so make sure to not yell too much, okay? That’s my advice to you as your waitress.”

“Uuu.” As Lucia chided her Yukiha found herself at a complete loss for words. She more than likely felt embarrassed after yelling as she did. They were all in a café called “Gustahl” . Iuli and Yukiha were sitting across from each other at a window seat. As it was their day off Iuli was in rough looking attire and Yukiha was in her usual school uniform. Lastly was a waitress who stood right beside them with a charming smile on her face.

Her name was Lucia von Elde Fern, A beautiful woman with beautiful hair, heavenly proportions and an alluring gaze. In addition, she is presently one of the strongest races of beings in the Demon World known as Witches.

What with their possessing immense amounts of mana as well as an overwhelming skill known as an “Original Sin” the other magic races could not even hold a candle to them when it came to sheer fighting power. That being said, while Lucia is in fact a Witch, she only came to the Human World because she wanted to have fun and is rather peculiar as Witches go.

To further add to her peculiarity she is now diligently working at her part-time job so as earn money of her own.

“I never would have thought... I would meet her again like this, though,” Iuli thought to himself as he looked on everything that happened that day.

That morning, a few hours earlier, Iuli awoke feeling something on top of his stomach.

“Hmmm?” It was heavy. There was no doubt in his mind that he felt a weight on his stomach.

“Did something fall off my bookshelf?” Iuli thought vaguely to himself as he then stretched out both his hands toward the mysterious mass. He then extended his arms so as to grab whatever was on top of him and return to dreaming but just as he did so he found it to be exceedingly soft. Very soft indeed, It was also warm and he knew without a doubt that it was the feel of bare skin.

“Hhnnn?!” As Iuli heard this cute cry reach his ears he found himself wide awake.

“Wha-What?”

“Go-Good morning, Iuli,” As he focused his vision and looked right in front of himself he found that a girl he knew was right on top of him. It was a girl by the name of Yashiro Tsuji who was in the same grade as him and used to be part of the “Black Witch Faction”.

She sat on top of him with his torso in between her legs in the same way one might expect to see her ride a horse. Her hands to her chest Iuli could see that her face was slightly red as she looked down at him. Just as he was wondering what she was wearing he could then see that she was wearing a frilly apron.

“Um... I-It, um, tickles... when you touch my butt like that,” stated Yashiro as she started to squirm. In so doing Iuli then finally realized that he was grabbing a girl’s butt. As Iuli panicked and let go of her did Yashiro then return to her usual expressionless face.

“Good morning.”

“Ye-Yeah, good morning... But for that matter, Yashiro, just what are you doing here? This is my room, right?”

“Well didn’t you ask me to come wake you?”

“Aah, now that you mention it,” replied Iuli as he remembered Yashiro asking if there was anything she could do for him and so asked her to wake him up the next morning. That said he had expected her to call his cell phone and never thought she would actually go into his room to wake him up directly.

“How did you get in?”

“The door was unlocked.” His never making a habit of locking his door was yet another of Iuli’s flakey characteristics.

“I see that Yashiro’s the same as ever… I know she’s not a bad person, but this is just too much.” To describe their relationship in just a few words would be rather difficult and quite the undertaking. The long of the short of it would be that in the fight that took place in the deepest part of the academy Iuli ended up fighting her and ultimately saving her. Of course, Iuli himself did not really feel that he “saved” her.

All he did was do what he wanted to do. However, in Yashiro’s eyes, she felt she had to repay her debt to him for saving her as well as atone for hurting him. Such is why she had been trying to do something for him ever since. Though it sounded like a good idea at first there was a fundamental problem with it.

“For the sake of curing your fear of women I thought I would try to wake you up in a more extreme way. Is it working?”

It was this. This was the problem. Iuli Asagami vowed to never hit girls. That was his credo. Such was what was drilled into him when he was young and such was the kind of man he wished to become from the very bottom of his heart.

Such was why when he fought Yashiro that he simply went on the defensive and evaded her attacks without attacking her once.

It was an unsightly defeat. However, right as he was defeated by her, he used his “extraordinary” power to send her father flying without hesitation. As a result, due to some misunderstanding or other, Yashiro fell under the impression that he had a fear of women.

“You know, Yashiro, I’ve said this whole bunch of times before but I don’t have a fear of women,” he goes on to tell her, Again and again in the hopes that she would understand but, “there is no need to be reserved.

I take pride in my being able to serve you and do all that I can for you.” Such was how Yashiro would respond. Her misunderstanding seemingly irreparable it looked as though he would never be able to clear things up anytime soon.

“Well, it’s not like she’s hurting anybody,” Iuli thought to himself, “Just the opposite, this sort of thing has its benefits, too... This is a nice angle.”

“So is that frilly apron some kind of extreme treat for me?”

“Yes.”

“Haha, well thanks for that.”

“Does it suit me?”

“Yeah, it looks great on you. Good job.”

“I see. Thank goodness,” replied the shy Yashiro as she was happy from the very bottom of heart.

“It looks as though it was worth enduring the embarrassment in putting on nothing but an apron.”

“Yeah, in the end, seeing a girl in nothing but an apron is every guy’s dre- Wait, you’re in nothing but an apron?!” Iuli couldn’t help but reply in shock as he then reflexively got himself out of bed.

Springing himself out of bed with such force that Yashiro, who was straddling his torso just a moment ago, now laid across his bed.

“Kyaa!” Having lost her balance Yashiro then frantically went about keeping herself covered with the hem of her apron.

Normally such a thing would not have to be done, and it would be far from arousing, but with her wearing nothing but an apron on the situation was different, completely different, and earth-shatteringly different.

“Wa-Wait, Yashiro… You said… You were wearing nothing but an apron, right?”

“Right.”

“Eh? Eeh? Then what… You’re not… Wearing anything under there?”

“Correct.”

“Then… You’re not wearing any underwear?”

“Correct,” she continued to answer in exceedingly brief and indifferent responses.

“Seriously,? I mean sure, her shoulders and collarbone are pretty much completely exposed, but… I would have thought for sure that she would at least have a strapless bra on underneath,” Iuli thought to himself.

Now completely awake Iuli found himself staring at Yashiro’s apron. It was the same apron he saw her in when he woke up.

That being said, however, he could not help but feel something was different. What he saw should have been the same and yet what he felt couldn't be any more different.

"Oh yeah," Iuli thought to himself, "when I ended up grabbing her butt... I get the feeling that was all I grabbed." As Iuli was recalling the sensation he had felt with his hands Yashiro stood herself right up.

"Now then, since you seem to be completely awake, I will now go about preparing breakfast. I brought my own ingredients as well."

"Oi! Hold on! Don't just go walking around like that! You're being way too defenseless!"

"Is that bad?"

"It's not but... it is!

"Please do not let it bother you," replied Yashiro in a placid manner while in contrast Iuli was completely flustered.

"I have gone about studying day and night so as to deepen my knowledge of men's fantasies as well as mentality so as to better serve you, Iuli."

"And at the end of all that, that's how you came to wake me up with nothing but an apron on, huh."

"In the world of men there is apparently a saying about how 'men love it when things are almost visible and yet not.'"

"I can't say I'm not familiar with that saying."



“As such, I learned all I could while keeping that aspect of man’s nature in mind. This apron was something I made myself but my countermeasure for panty flashes is perfect. No matter how strong a sudden breeze may be they will not flip up. What’s more I have also mastered movements where I will be able to keep my private parts hidden no matter what the situation. Even if I exhaust myself from a triple accel I am confident no one will catch a glimpse of my private parts.”

“You’re strangely serious about this, huh!” said Iuli as he was listening to her mysterious words all the while looking over her standing figure. Despite all the extreme movements she did earlier he certainly did not see what was beyond the apron. She was doing a perfect job of embodying “almost visible and yet not.”

“The flapping arpon... Her shining thighs... The hint of side boob peeking out... I see, this is fantastic,” Iuli thought, “it certainly is, but-“

“Yashiro, I bow to all the hard work you have done... But, it looks like you haven’t done all your research yet.”

“What do you mean?” Upon hearing this Iuli could not help but sigh and then answered her right away.

“There certainly isn’t anything wrong with your interpretation but it’s too early to say that you’ve shown a man’s true nature yet. Guys won’t be interested once they find out it’s all superficial. You know that saying earlier? Well there’s a continuation to it.” Once Iuli cleared his throat, he then went on to say this:

“Men love it when things are almost visible and yet not... But then again it should not even come to that,’ by Iuli Asagami.” Yashiro was stunned. In that instant she looked as though she were struck by some

incredible attack. Her reaction was as if the very foundation of her identity had collapsed.

“It cannot be... Then, everything I had studied has all been-“

“Don’t look so down, Yashiro, everything you learned won’t go to waste. It’s just that the world of men isn’t all that easy to understand.”

“Iuli...”

“From now on be sure to keep up the good work and don’t ever stop.”

“Yes, I will do my best,” replied Yashiro as she clenched her fists. As Iuli looked on at Yashiro with a peaceful expression reminiscent of an old teacher at the back of his mind he was thinking:

“Just what am I saying?” He thought feeling strangely empty inside, “how do I say it.. I feel like I’m subbing in for the straight man in a comedy duo.”

“Men love it when things are almost visible and yet not... But then again it should not even come to that” ... What a deep expression. This is very educational,” said Yashiro as she went about writing Iuli’s random words down in a notepad she pulled out of her apron pocket. The expression on her face the very epitome of seriousness and the mood demanded no less. He could not help but feel troubled by her taking something so seriously when he wasn’t. It was not so much that she was honest but she was honest to a fault. The way she soaked in whatever he taught her was reminiscent of an innocent baby.

“A baby... Ah, that’s right,” Iuli thought to himself as he remembered Yashiro’s actual age and his face took on a frown. Sometime earlier when the two of them were just chatting he had found out that she was five years old.

“Five?! You’re five years old?!”

“Yes. As you know I am a cyborg and while I was in an incubator I was forced to grow to look as though I was between the ages of 14-18 when I was actually two years old at the time. Once I had grown I worked under the professor for three years so I believe it would be accurate to say that I am five years old right now.”

“Seriously,? You’re five? You’re practically a loli.”

“That being said, though, thanks to my using a learning device I have attained an immense amount of knowledge about magic equivalent to that of a college graduate as well as common knowledge so I believe calling me a loli would be a bit lacking.”

“So you know what a loli is, huh.”

“I have common knowledge equivalent to that of a college graduate,” said Yashiro who seemed to go on about what she was but Iuli did not keep the conversation going. With her dark, heavy history he had no idea how he should respond. However, if she did not seem to be bothered by it then Iuli figured that he should act the same. He did not want to pity her.

“I’m sure it wasn’t all bad,” Iuli thought to himself, “I’m sure her life is only just getting started for her.” To Iuli, Yashiro was both a person as well as a girl and nothing would change that and when he thought of that once again he could not help but smile a little.

“So in essence... I should just take everything off, shouldn’t I?”

“How did you come to that,?!” Upon hearing this Iuli could not help but feel like an idiot and in his mind demanded that she give him back his feelings of serious concern.

“Then what about when you said about, ‘it should not even come to that’?”

“Well... I did say that, but you know-”

“It is embarrassing, but... if it is for you, I will-”

“If it’s so embarrassing then keep everything on!”

“Now then, shall I undress while doing a happy dance?”

“What, you’re going to strip dance?! Ugh!” said Iuli as he held his head in his hands. In truth he wanted to see it. He would pay to see it. He wanted to see Yashiro, naked as the day she was born, with his own two eyes. However, she was doing this so as to show her thanks and atone for what she had done to him, with her doing this with such noble feelings... He could not help but feel that he would lose something as a person. He was certain that this was not what a man was supposed to act.

“How do I say it... Whenever I’m with you I can’t help but feel like my endurance and principles as a man get stronger and stronger every time.”

“I will take that as a compliment. I am honored to hear you say that.” His sarcasm did not work on her. Yashiro then made a point of lifting the front of her apron dress and give a cute little pose. As he thought about the idea that she was completely bare underneath her movements were certainly racy but she moved in such a way that made things almost visible while at the same time showed off her exquisite curves.

“By the way, Iuli, should you really be taking it easy like this? Didn’t you ask me to wake you up because there was something you had to do?”

“And just whose fault do you think that is? But well, you’re right; today I’m going to-”

“You’re late, Iuli! Just how long do you intend to sleep?” said a girl as she walked in, opening the door with great force. Her face was clean and ready and as well dressed in a sophisticated way. Her gorgeous, vibrant hair tied up in the back into a single ponytail. She was Seishun Academy’s most talented female student – Yukiha Kudoin.

“Honestly I just cannot believe you… You are always like this, just how long do you have to sleep until you are satisfied? To begin with you were the one who asked me to help you out today, didn’t you? You said that you just had to go on a da- Hhnn! I-I mean go shopping with me so I left my precious day off open and yet… No matter how long I waited you did not show up at all… I have no intention of saying just how late you are, but… You are an hour late… And no, I had just come here! I wasn’t waiting at all, you got that?!

Anyway! If you are late you are la-” Though she had entered the room speaking frantically and quickly all the while making excuses for herself the instant she saw what was going on in the room her words came to a complete stop. She had stopped moving altogether, in fact. Iuli, also, stopped completely. It was all a matter of positioning.

At the present moment, in that small six tatami room, Iuli lay seated on his bed with Yashiro standing right in front of him and Yukiha was standing right behind her, Though she was in nothing but an apron Yashiro stated that no one would be able to see anything. However, this only applied to Iuli. From Yukiha’s perspective everything was completely exposed. It was that which Iuli wanted to see so badly and yet was able to endure somehow. It was probably because he was held captive by her stunning hips.

“Wha-Wha-Wha-“

“No-Now stay calm, Yukiha. It’s not what you think, there’s a really good reason why she’s doing this-” Yukiha’s face just continued to get redder and Iuli was desperately trying to figure out an explanation he could give her. In between the two was Yashiro who had a stoic expression about her as she remembered she was completely exposed from behind and so hid her buttocks all the while letting out a small scream. That being said, however, she did this with no expression on her face and was actually quite cute. It was immediately after this that Iuli heard Yukiha’s bellowing voice.

Seishun Private Academy is an organized anti-magic squad and is one of the lower organizations of the “Gouma Knight Squad.” Located in the small corner of the local city of Hamaya it is here where mages are trained and raised.

So as to keep the academy isolated from civilian contact the academy was made in an enclosed valley surrounded by mountains where not even convenience stores, much less homes, could be built. As it would take a whole day to reach any sort of city by bus Seishun Academy has effectively isolated itself from the outside world. Within the confines of the academy are several dining halls as well as stores so one would be able to get whatever they wanted without having to leave the academy. Though it is true that the academy provides everything one could need there are only a few who rely solely on the academy to get what they want.

“Haaa, just what am I going to do with you, Yashiro,” mumbled Iuli, letting out a sigh as he paid his bus fare. We now find ourselves at a bus terminal. Yukiha followed shortly afterwards and then she drew closer to Iuli with a look of uncertainty on her face.

“Iuli, were you really not the one who told Yashiro to dress like that?”

“Enough already, like I said I wasn’t, that was something Yashiro did on her own.”

“Hmpf, I wouldn’t be so sure. We are talking about a lustful fellow like you after all. The idea of you making an ignorant and duty bound girl like Yashiro put on such a shameful outfit is plenty plausible.”

“You just don’t trust me at all, huh.”

“I am only saying that based on your usual behavior.”

“And besides, I wouldn’t do something half-assed like have her wear nothing but an apron. Having her also wear white socks is more my styl-”

“Nii-sama, that is what she meant by your usual behavior,” said Seria as she hopped off the bus like a rabbit and shaking her head in disappointment. While the academy certainly sold clothing they were all practically the same design as tracksuits. When Iuli heard about this he was unaffected. For his sister, Seria, however, who was coming of age it was an exceedingly cruel thing to hear. Such was why the Asagami siblings asked Yukiha to guide them through the city.

“It would have been great if Yashiro had come, too. She’s got practically no clothes you could call ‘casual’.”

“It is not as though she could help it. Today is the day that they take care of her paperwork so she can rise to C-Rank, after all.” Just the other day, and although both Iuli and Yashiro were both in the same D-Rank, Yashiro rose to C-Rank after the latest make-up test. She had just been acting like a novice so as to hide her true identity but now that she had nothing to worry about she was able to rise to C-Rank with ease by using a little more of her power than she did before. More specifically,

she could have shown more of her power but if she did that she ran the risk of her identity being found out. That being the case she said that she would refrain from rising in rank for a while.

“Momo-chan-sensei is just nasty, huh... She didn’t have to make her do it on the weekend of all days.”

“It’s because the summer ranking matches will be starting soon. The teachers will be busy as well preparing it. One’s treatment is dependent on how one does in these matches so there is a need for them to get her rank promotion finished quickly.” At Seishun Academy a ranking match between students is held four times a year. As one’s results in the ranking matches has a great impact on one’s grades, and many people involved with the Knight Squad come to watch, it greatly affects the paths one can take after they graduate.

Apparently the reason why it is held four times a year and in such a short span is so as to give those of a lower rank a chance to succeed as well as instill a sense of caution in those of higher ranks.

“The ranking matches, huh... You’ll be taking part, too, right?” asked Iuli. At the present time Yukiha Kudoin holds the highest rank in the academy. That is to say that she is the strongest mage in all of the academy. Right after she was enrolled in the high school section she took part in the ranking matches and in the end took first place for herself.

“Of course I will. Because if I don’t I will lose my ranking.”

“Really?”

“Seishun Academy is a place where they value the strong. The ranking order is all decided by how one does in the matches. All your previous accomplishments in battle have practically no value whatsoever.”

“That’s a pretty strict way of doing things.”

“A single defeat on the battlefield would cost one’s life. In order for everyone to always be wary and on their guard it is necessary to be this strict.”

“Hmmm.”

“What are you going to do, Iuli?”

“I’m thinking about it. Then again, let’s stop talking about this for today. We did come all this way to shop and all.” After that, the three of them all walked around the city with Yukiha leading them.

“By the way, Iuli, Seria, I know it is kind of late to ask this, but… Are you really all right with having me guide you?”

“Hm? Why do you ask?”

“Well, you see… I am embarrassed to say this but I do not come to the city all that often so I can only really tell you about downtown here.”

“Ah, I had a feeling that was the case. You definitely don’t seem like the type to go out and play after school.”

“If that is so then surely there is someone better who could-”

“Don’t say something so sad. I asked you to come along because I wanted to have a date with you like this.”

“Wha… Li-Like I have told you countless times before this is not a date!”

“Hahaa, you don’t have to blush like tha- Ah, ow!” Iuli felt a slight pain in his side. Upon looking down he saw that Seria was walking right beside him with her elbow out.

“What are you doing, Seria?”

“Nothing. It seemed as though you were forgetting about me so I just thought I would appeal to you a little bit,” said Seria with a pout on her face. That said though, her face reverted back to a smile.

“But regardless, I am happy that we are out buying clothes. They sell nothing but tracksuits at the academy after all and I would be a little embarrassed if I went out in my uniform on my day off- Ah!” It was just as Seria said this that she covered her mouth with her hand. Yukiha was right before her who, although was not in dire need of clothes like Seria was, was walking about the city with her uniform on.

“Fo-Forgive me. I was not trying to condemn you just now, Yukiha-san.”

“O-Oh, of course. I know you did not mean it that way.”

“I was not at all thinking you were an uncouth woman for wearing your uniform on your day out when you are rich!”

“I can sense ill will in your comment!”

“Oh yeah, you’re in your uniform, huh, Yukiha,” said Iuli as he tried to break the tension. Today he was hoping that he would get to see Yukiha in her casual clothes but when he saw that she was in her uniform he was a little shocked. For that matter, when he really thought about it, he had never seen Yukiha in anything but her uniform.

“Hey, could it be that you don’t have any clothes of your own?”

“Of course I do! I am not a fool!” retorted Yukiha as she snapped at him. “Well I do but they are mostly clothes that were sent from home so, how do I say it... Many of them are very high class so if I walked around the city in one of them I would end up floating.” Yukiha’s family, the Kuhouin family, is apparently a very renowned family. Iuli did not know the details but they were well-known in the area.

“Now that I think about it, she said that her and that shorty’s family had some sort of relationship with one another, huh,” Iuli thought to himself. The dignified air about her as well her overly earnest personality was probably brought about by her being raised in such a famous family. One could see just how well she was raised by the way she conducted herself. As well as how sheltered she was.

“She didn’t know about masturbating and all,” Iuli remembered.

“Oi, Iuli, you were not thinking of anything unsavory just now, were you?” said Yukiha as she glared at him with her sharp gaze to which he looked back at her with his stubborn smile.

“Oh no, I wasn’t thinking anything like that at all. I wasn’t thinking about your using a word you didn’t know was dirty at all.”

“Hhn?! Wh-Why you... I told you to never speak of that again, didn’t I?!

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“What do I mean? You know what I mean... That time when I... Uuuu!” Yukiha found that she could not say anything more and so stomped the ground in frustration as her face turned bright red.

“Oh, Nii-sama.”

“I know. I’m sorry, Yukiha. Please forgive me,” said Iuli as Seria made him take responsibility for his actions and made him apologize. That said, though, Yukiha continued to pout.

“Goodness gracious. You are just as much to blame, Yukiha-san. You let his vulgar words get the better of you and that is why he continues to make fun of you. Nii-sama is nothing but talk so feel free to just ignore him.”

“Huh? Who’s nothing but talk?” Iuli replied in surprise to which Seria smiled proudly at him.

“Nii-sama, you may be a pervert but you are not scum. I also know you well enough that when it comes to Yashiro, or any girl for that matter, you basically do not lay your hands on them. The best way to define you is that you are a feminist. The worst would be a good-for-nothing.”

“Wha-What was that!?”

“You are an unhypocritical pseudo-erotic.”

“What’s with that new nickname?”

“You misunderstood the phrase ‘boys who are a little naughty are popular’ and now you go around talking about sex with girls like a middle school boy going through puberty.”

“Don’t go talking about middle school boys when you’re in middle school yourself!”

“Huhuhn, girls mature faster than boys I will have you know, Nii-sama,” said Seria as she gave him a mature smile. Iuli could not find any way to talk back to her and so, feeling discouraged, let his shoulders sag.

“Damn... Seria’s acting like an adult in weird ways,” Iuli thought to himself. All three of them chatted as they walked until they made it to

the fashion building they were looking for. Judging from the outside it seemed that the building housed various brands inside it.

“This is it! This building apparently sells clothes to a younger demographic,” said Yukiha with a sense of relief and joy in her voice as they found their destination.

“When I asked her to guide us I meant I wanted her to guide us to her favorite store, though,” thought Iuli, a little disappointed. It was just recently that Yukiha said that she did not go into the city all that often. This was probably even her first time coming to this building but she had done various kinds of research for Iuli and Seria. It was hard to tell if she was dutiful or overly serious.

“Thanks, Yukiha. Now then, since we have a place to shop... Let’s go and raise some money.”

“Raise some money? Just what do you mean by that?”

“Just what I said, we siblings don’t have a single penny on us.”

“Nii-sama... Please do not sound so proud about something like that... It’s embarrassing.” To begin with, the reason Iuli and Seria came to Seishun Academy was “because they had trouble finding food for themselves.” The Japanese government is in direct control of Seishun Academy and is a global as well as public agency.

For the students affiliated with the academy as knight squad candidates they would be taken care of in ways they never thought imaginable. Room and board as well as classes were completely free. If one made a request one would be able to have their living and food expenses paid in full in the form of a scholarship for which they were not obligated to pay back. Both Iuli and Seria have taken advantage of this but what they got in terms of money was nothing but a paltry sum.

“So that is how it is... If it is clothes you want I would be happy to lend you some money for them.”

“Don’t worry about it. We have our own secret strategy we like to use in situations like this... Now let’s see...” said Iuli as he was looking around the area, his eyes darting this way and that.

“If it’s this busy here then... Oh, found it!” exclaimed Iuli, a smirk breaking out on his face after he found just what he was looking for.

“The special giga-sized curry rice,! If you’re able to eat it all in 30 minutes then you’ll win ¥30,000!” What Iuli had found was a restaurant poster a few meters ahead of him. Stating what he had just said in big letters.

“Seria!”

“Got it!” Their minds were in synch. Everything the two Asagami siblings had to say was said in that one instant. Seria’s eyes began to sparkle and she had to wipe her mouth off with her hand as she had begun to drool.

“I will be off then! Please feel free to entertain yourselves around here until I get back,” said Seria as she then ran for the restaurant at breakneck speed.

“I have come to take the challenge!” said Seria as she excitedly entered the restaurant.

“So this is... Your secret plan?” said Yukiha, a look of shock on her face, and Iuli just simply said, “yeah,” as he nodded his head.

“Will she be all right? If she cannot eat all of that in the allotted time they will ask for payment.”

“No problem, she’ll be fine. Seria’s stomach is seriously a bottomless pit.” When the two of them were left to fend for themselves there were countless occasions where they earned money this way so as to live.

“To her eating curry rice is as easy as breathing air.”

“But it’s not even something you can drink.”

“Well while we’re waiting for Seria I found this nice looking café so let’s wait for her there.”

On the first floor of a downtown building with many other stores and shops inside it was a café by the name of “Gustahl.” As it was before noon no one was in the café yet. The colors inside were very subdued. So much so that the calming music it played was enough to make people forget the hustle and bustle that was just outside. The two of them then took a seat at a table with two chairs by the window.

“Hm. It certainly has a pleasant ambiance about it.”

“To be honest, I actually chose this place because of the waitress’ outfits.”

“Are such things truly the only thing running through that mind of yours?!”

“Yup.”

“Don’t nod your head so proudly!”

“Waitresses are really great, huh. They have a whole other charm that’s different from the maid outfit. The fact it only shows off so much skin is actually nice in its own right. I know, next time I’ll have Yashiro- No, I’m kidding, I’m kidding, and it’s just a joke. I won’t mess around with

Yashiro,” said Iuli in a panic, shaking his head as a look of scorn began to show in Yukiha’s eyes. Moving on, Iuli then handed her a menu that was at their table.

“Ladies first.”

“Right,” said Yukiha who apparently seemed to be slightly embarrassed. As she was deciding what she wanted to order from the menu a waitress came to bring them water.

“Welcome,” she then went on to say. Her outfit was cute and frilly the length of her skirt so exquisitely short that one could see her thighs shine underneath. The design around the chest was incredibly sparse and emphasized her bountiful bust.

“Once you have decided what you would like to order I will be happy to take it. Just so you know, today’s recommendation is the ‘Deluxe Chocolate Royal Parfait that comes with a secret service’ as well.” The waitress spoke in a rather, or to be more specific, quite informal tone as she spoke to them.

“Ah, as for what that secret service is it is just something I do on my own. At the cost of an extra ¥500 I will feed you my-se-lf,” said the waitress as she posed herself in a way to emphasize her bust and showed off her captivating smile. From Yukiha’s perspective, it was a captivating gaze that was very familiar to her.

“You... Are you Lucia?!” exclaimed Yukiha as she leaned over while staring at her.

“Hm? Geh... Yukiha-chan?!” Upon seeing who it was, the waitress’s that is Lucia’s, eyes shot right open.

“And even Iuli-kun is here... Wow, fancy meeting you here.”

“Wh-What are you doing in a place like this?”

“Well this is a surprise... I guess it’s a small world after all.” As Yukiha and Lucia had looks of agitation as well as shock on their faces Iuli opened his menu with one hand and casually ordered, “for now I’ll take the ‘Deluxe Chocolate Royal Parfait that comes with a secret service’.”

“Don’t just brush this off and order something!” After coming to a café they had just found by chance the two of them were able to reunite with Lucia. One could say that it was by incredible coincidence that, in regards to “the restaurant’s outfit” or “the restaurant itself,” that both Iuli and Lucia had chosen the café because “the uniform was cute.” This being the case one could partially say that it was fate that they would meet again.

“This is my job. I’m working part-time here. I both live and work here,” answered Lucia as she was asked why she was working there by Yukiha right after she brought a parfait to their table. Conducting herself in a way any experienced waitress would. Yukiha had a look of utter disbelief on her face. Typically magic beings are recognized as the enemies of mages or, that is to say, of humanity.

Since time immemorial there have been many cases where magic beings came through a “Gate” to wreak havoc on the human world. It is because of their seemingly overwhelming might mages sharpen their skills, form organizations and work towards saving humanity from disaster. So seeing a magic being, especially a Witch with a power as immense as hers, working part-time in the Human World was something so unheard of that it was not easy for Yukiha to believe.

However, as far as Iuli could tell, it looked as though she was taking her work seriously. When Yukiha was bombarding her with questions earlier she went on to say, “Ah, wait a minute. The manager will get

mad at me if I stand here talking for too long so just go ahead and order that secret service I mentioned. If you do that I'll be able to talk with you then." She also said this as she could not help but notice they were drawing the attention of the manager as well as other employees. Such was why Iuli had no choice but to ask for the secret service. That he had no choice but to go "aaaahn" as Lucia brought the scoop of parfait to his mouth. Yes, he had no choice. No choice whatsoever.

"As you know, I only came here to have fun but, in the end, I found I just can't live without money. That's why I'm working here right now. Huhuhn, and as it so turns out I am quite amazing. Ever since I started working here sales have gone up by 10%," Lucia explained. Yukiha ultimately could not help but be doubtful of her but Iuli believed her for the most part.

"It's not as if... I don't have my pride as a Witch. But beyond that I, myself, am more important. If I cannot do what I want then having 'power' is meaningless." Such was what she told him one time. When she did so he thought she was telling him the honest truth with no lies whatsoever. Reason being was because he could not see any deceit in her eyes.

"Hmpf, I don't know what you're plotting... but just try it. When you do I won't hesitate in reporting you to the Knight Squad."

"Uhuhu, if you do that won't your position just get worse? You helped me so that would make you a traitor you know?"

"I also value my own life here but, should the need arise, I will defend myself. When it comes to goals I may have I will do anything and everything to see them through but I am not willing to lower myself to the level of scum who sacrifice innocent people to see as to accomplish,"

said Lucia as both she and Yukiha began to glare at each other. A dangerous air began to fill the room.

“Oioi, stop it you two. Let’s all get along, girls,” said Iuli in a panic as he tried to neutralize the situation. With that, Lucia then shrugged her shoulders.

“Well, I believe I said this already but I am not plotting anything. I only came here to have fun,” Lucia then went on to say as she went to feed Iuli another spoonful. Iuli then went “aaaahn” as he opened his mouth and Yukiha made another disinterested look on her face. It was here when, “ah, sorry, it’s my phone,” Iuli pulled out his phone from his pocket. There was no telling how old it was but it was a cell phone with a folding screen. This, again, was something provided by the academy. Other than it receiving calls and texts this cell phone could do not do anything else so there were hardly any students who would use them but with it being free Iuli was happy to take it.

“Nii-sama, where are you?” It would seem that the one who called him was his sister, Seria.

“Seria, what’s up? Weren’t you going to eat that curry rice at that restaurant?”

“I have already finished it.”

“Huh? You’re kidding, right? It hasn’t even been 20 minutes yet.”

“With curry rice like that 15 minutes was more than enough.”

“As my little sister I can’t help but be a little afraid of you.”

“I am going through puberty after all. Also, seeing as how I finished it in 15 minutes I politely negotiated with the owner to make the reward ¥50,000 so right now my wallet is quite full.”

“As my little sister you’re pretty damn reliable.”

“So, where are you, Nii-sama? No matter how hard I looked in the fashion building I could not find you.” Now that he thought about it he forgot to tell her that they were going to kill some time at the café they were at.

“We’re, uuuh... at a café not too far from- Ah, no, forget it, just wait there and I’ll come get ya.” After interrupting Lucia’s and Yukiha’s conversation for a little bit with his call Iuli then went dashing out of the café.

“Oh my, what a restless boy,” said Lucia, stunned, as he watched Iuli from behind as he ran off. Once he was out of sight Lucia then went back to scoop another spoonful and bring it to Yukiha’s mouth.

“What is this?”

“I am continuing with my service. Now that Iuli-kun is gone, here, have a bite, Yukiha-chan.”

“No thank you.”

“You sure? If you end my service you won’t be able to talk with me, you know?”

“I have nothing I want to discuss with you.”

“Reeeeally?” said Lucia as she chuckled and let a smile break out on her face. From her shining, exceedingly beautiful eyes was a gaze that Yukiha found she could not ignore.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Nothing. I just thought that maybe there was something you wanted to talk to me about.” Yukiha fell silent and a frown came over her face.

“So she saw right through me,” Yukiha thought to herself. One could say this was only to be expected of a seasoned Witch. She apparently thought that it wasn’t out of pure kindness that she let her go.

“I do not like to draw things out so I will get right to the point,” said Yukiha as she resolved herself to ask Lucia her question.

“Lucia, would you happen to know a woman by the name Haruha Kudoin?”

“Hmmm... I see... So you are looking for your mother. So you let me go so you could ask me, hm.” After hearing Yukiha’s question Lucia then went on to say this in a disinterested tone:

“I am sorry but I don’t. I have never met her.”

“I see,” though Yukiha was sad to hear that she did not despair. Though it would be a lie to say she did not have any expectations to begin with she also did not think she would find a clue in the city.

“But I must say this is a surprise. I can’t believe that your mother was there when ‘Witch Dystopia’ and ‘Lord Bloody’ had their showdown three years ago. Even now people talk about that fight as though it were a legend but, in actuality, there were surprisingly few people who witnessed that fight.”

“Really? But wait... Wasn’t that fighting the very fight that would decide everything between Witches and Vampires?”

“It was a showdown but it was not an all-out war. Well, the Vampires had gathered all their forces and fought but ‘Witch Dystopia’ destroyed them all by herself.” To this Yukiha just listened on silently.

“In all honesty, we Witches do not know the true identity of ‘Witch Dystopia,’ either. More than half of us did not even see what she looked like. That of course goes for me as well. Witches are normally part of a faction but she was not part of any faction at all. She just suddenly appeared and took out all our enemies.” Everything about the strongest witch, ‘Witch Dystopia,’ was shrouded in mystery. So it was not only the Human World that was lacking information about her. Her existence was even unknown in the Demon World.

“So... you had a complete stranger end your fight all by herself... what an anti-climactic story.”

“Ahaa, you really are a serious one, huh, Yukiha-chan,” said Lucia as a smile came over her face.

“No one thought of it as anti-climactic. Everyone was having the time of their lives and was like, ‘I don’t know who you are but I’m super lucky that you defeated all my enemies.’ It’s like a fisherman feeling like he won when the fishing pole did all the work. After that we annihilated all the remaining forces and made ourselves the supreme rulers of the Demon World.”

“So that is how it goes.”

“That’s right; it was a war, after all.”

“Once that was over, well, a lot of other things ended up happening. Reason being was that not only did we not know who it was who crushed their leader but we also had no news about her whereabouts. To top it off we did not even know if she was still alive or not.” Thinking

about it rationally, one would think that “Witch Dystopia,” the Witch who defeated “Lord Bloody,” would make herself the ruler of the Witches.

As the heroine of the war she had the right to rule over the Demon World. Even if she did not want to rule she at least had a duty to set policies as well as some guidelines. However, that very heroine was nowhere to be seen. It would not be hard to imagine there being a struggle over who would take the ruler’s throne.

“So at the center of all that was that Witch, It is just as her name suggests, she really did bring about dystopia,” said Yukiha as her expression darkened and reflected deeply on what she had just heard.

“‘Witch Dystopia,’ hm,” she thought to herself. To Yukiha this unknown Witch was very important to her. The reason why was because that in time she might become an enemy of the Knight Squad but this was not the only reason. In this case another reason was because this Witch might have killed her mother.

“Iuli-kun.” Taken by surprise at the name that came from her mouth Yukiha found herself coming right back to reality.

“Wha-What? Did he already come back?”

“Eh? Ah, no, that’s not it. I was just thinking that when ‘Witch Dystopia’ killed ‘Lord Bloody,’ who was supposedly immortal, that she had to be unbelievably strong and I got to thinking how incredibly strong Iuli-kun was, too.” Yukiha’s gaze then went right to the seat across from her, Just a few moments earlier Iuli Asagami was sitting right there.

“He’s amazing, isn’t he? Iuli, I mean.”

“He certainly is. That unusual ‘strength,’ in all honesty, is beyond my realm of understanding.”

“Ah, uhn-uhn, that’s not what I meant. I already understand just how unbelievably strong he is but I was just thinking he was amazing in how he does not look strong at all.”

“His not looking strong... is amazing?”

“I have seen quite my share of bloodbaths after all. There were a lot of them who looked strong, you know. That was what they were trying to go for but I could not see through Iuli’s ‘strength’ at all. I don’t really know how to describe it... It is because he is strong that he can be so calm and carefree but he has virtually none of the arrogance or pride of someone who is strong... Would you understand if I said it like that?”

“I get what you are trying to say,” Arrogance and pride. Such are things that everyone with some level of power probably has. Naturally, the same could probably be said for Yukiha as well. However, Iuli did not have that. One could even say he had none at all. As far as the “peculiar” way he carries himself is concerned she, too, could not help but be a little curious about him. Anyone could tell that he had a power that would easily dub him “the strongest” and yet he does not flaunt his power at all.

Then again it would not be accurate to call him humble or modest, either. He understands that he wields an unfathomable power and wastes no effort to use it when he has to. He said that his power was his. Based on what Iuli and Seria told her one day he just suddenly found out that he had become truly strong but, for all she knew, his strength could have been brought about by something otherworldly. Seria described it as he had “awakened” but such a concept was wild speculation at best.

“Either way, he’s dangerous, huh. I think his not looking strong is another kind of strength of his.”

“But he can’t possibly be completely devoid of arrogance. I think his belief in ‘not hitting women’ is a kind of arrogance if nothing else.” Yukiha herself has argued with him about his beliefs as well.

“That’s true; his not seeming strong might be because of that policy of his. However, it might actually be just the opposite.”

“The opposite?”

“When I first heard that… he had a policy ‘against hitting women,’ I will admit that I laughed at him. However, it could be that was some kind of ‘restriction’ he placed on himself. He might have placed it on himself so he would not look down on anyone and uses it as a precept.”

“A restriction…”

“By restriction I meant like a vow. He has so much power, after all. Do you really think he can wield such immense power without some sort of restriction? Uhuu, what a strange thought, the one who is most afraid of his power is none other than himself,” Lucia went on, laughing as though she were talking about something amusing. She spoke as though she knew everything about Iuli and Yukiha found that, in itself, amusing as well.

“Hmpf, whatever the case may be, you have no right to criticize him.”

“Eh?”

“I heard about you and how you placed a seal on your own power.” When Witches set foot into the Human World along with their massive amounts of mana they become easily detectible by other people. No matter how a Witch tries to suppress her mana the Knight Squad

organization would be able to find her and her powerful mana with their search network. In this case, however, Lucia put a magic sealing crest on herself so as to avoid all that.

“Ah yes... that certainly is true,” said Lucia as she let a simple smile come over her face.

“As someone who has thrown away her power like myself I have no right to condemn him, do I?” Once she said that the Witch fell silent. Yukiha was a little curious about why she became so discouraged but something else entirely was occupying her mind. In this case it was Iuli Asagami’s restriction he put on himself.

“He can’t have just imposed one restriction on himself,” Yukiha thought to herself. His belief in not hitting women could not be the only restriction he has put on himself. Lucia may not know it but Yukiha did. She learned firsthand and had the sight of Iuli without his choker carved right into her very being. In the special training area known as “Space,” a dimension separate from the real world, Yukiha caught a glimpse of what made Iuli “the world’s strongest.”

Even now her body still remembered that horrifying, overwhelming mana that made the very hairs on her body stand on end. From what she heard from Iuli that choker was able to suppress the mana of whoever wore it to its very limits. If a normal mage wore it there was the potential danger that he or she would lose their life in the process. However to Iuli who had such an exceptional amount of mana it was nothing more than a limiter for him.

Even with his body in a weakened state he would be able to defeat virtually any opponent that faced him. Whether he sealed his power or not he would still end up victorious. If his fighting with everything he had would cause harm to him things would be different but seeing as

how he took off his choker when Yukiha asked him to without hesitation then this probably wasn't the case. Then what was the purpose of the seal? Just why would he weaken himself as he did?

"Is he really... weakening himself?" Yukiha wondered to herself, a strength that cannot be seen. If such a thing existed then-

"He has become strong... by limiting his own strength," Yukiha concluded to herself. As a result of the cursed item sealing his mana to its very limits people can barely sense any mana coming from him. Under normal circumstances his mana would be leaking out and exuding an especially strong aura but his mana is being completely shut out. Such is why no one recognizes his power or even notices it.

This is also the very reason why no feels wary around him. Even though he has a power that goes well beyond the levels of the academy, or of humanity's for that matter, that he is treated unfairly as a hopeless outcast. Despite being strong he is not recognized as such. For someone as serious and earnest as Yukiha this was an injustice that could not be allowed. She just can't stomach such things and can't help but feel nauseated knowing he was going through such things.

However, it would seem that this was nothing short of sweet notions of an honor student. In truth, those who are strong but are not recognized as such may just be nothing more than unfortunate, pitiful existences that were made to draw one's sympathies.

"Who was it?" thought Yukiha as she searched her memories during the time when she and Iuli were talking in "space."

"The one who weakened him and made him even stronger... If I'm not mistaken-"

Meanwhile, the very person who is shrouded in mystery as the strongest and worst Witch, “Witch Dystopia,” had just arrived on the seventh floor of the fashion building in search of his lovable little sister.

“Oh, I finally found ya, Seria,” said Iuli as he lightly called out his sister’s name after finding her looking around at a household goods store that was one of many chain stores throughout the country.

“Just when I thought you would be looking at clothes, I find you here of all places.”

“There is no point in looking at clothes if we do not look at them together.”

“What are you looking at? A water bottle?” asked Iuli as he noticed the slender, stylish water bottle in her hand.

“Are you going to buy that and use it? You don’t even use them in the first place.”

“Nii-sama, water bottles nowadays have become truly amazing, you know? This magic bottle is the second generation and is truly a bargain as it comes with heat-retentive properties as well. It keeps that which is hot, hot and keeps that which is cold, cold. I saw a commercial for it yesterday on TV and I wanted to get one,” said Seria as she was excitedly telling Iuli about what her water bottle could do. However, Iuli’s face, for one instant, took on a frown in the middle of Seria’s explanation.

“Magic bottle,” he said to himself.

“What is the matter, Nii-sama? Ah, they call it a magic bottle but, of course, it has nothing to do with magic. It is just a water bottle and cup

that was made to have a vacuum between the outer layer and inner layer so as to prevent heat conduction-”

“Oh, no, I know what the magic bottle is. It’s just that I ended up remembering something,” said Iuli in a shallow tone as he brought his hand to his neck.

“I never told you, did I?” asked Iuli as he put his hand to the woman’s choker around his neck, the special cursed item that sealed away the vast majority of his power.

“The name of this choker is ‘Magic Bottle’.” It was a memory of somewhere in the Demon World.

“You listening, my damned disciple? I’m just going to say this one more time,” said the man as he snapped his fingers. The one talking was a tall man whose body was wrapped in a pitch black cloak. Once he snapped his fingers his ring-type magic implement responded and made a tiny flame which he brought to the cigarette in his mouth. It was Julius Howlgate. The man who was both Iuli Asagami’s as well as Seria Asagami’s master. After puffing out some white smoke he then pointed at Iuli’s neck.

“That choker is a special cursed item that I personally made myself. You could say it’s the strongest sealer that was ever made. Even with mana as ridiculous as yours, as long as you have that on, not a single bit of it will come leaking out.” Julius was a genius.

As far as his battle prowess skills in magic was concerned there was hardly anyone who could match him. Among all of his skills his specialties were his lightning magic which boasted the widest attack range as well as overwhelming destructive power. Another would be his secret seal that he uses to conceal himself. Though he was a man with

more enemies than allies and was always targeted by someone his ability at hiding his very existence was so good that he has made a living in the shadows. If such a manmade magic items then it would only be natural to say that he would make the world's greatest sealing items.

"However," he went on to say, "It's impossible for that thing to completely suppress your powers on its own.

"I've made that choker so it'll draw out the power so you can suppress it yourself. It all depends on your will. You're even able to remove it yourself so as a sealing item it's totally defective. So basically what I'm trying to say is that the only one who can do anything about your power is you yourself."

"I know that already," said Iuli as he nodded his head and put his hand to the choker around his neck.

"Well, you really saved me, Master. If I didn't have this on, no matter how hard I tried to suppress it; just my aura leaking out would be enough to make all sorts of small animals pass out... There's no telling what would happen if I went to the Human World without this," said Iuli as he laughed sarcastically. In so doing, Julius then seemed to be looking off into the distance and went on to say this:

"That choker's name... How does 'Magic Bottle' sound?"

"Bottle,? Just how is this a bottle?"

"The magic bottle... Really isn't as magical as its name implies but is something that was made using scientific techniques. They just sell them in the Human World like it's no big deal," said Julius as he then gave a simple explanation of what a magic bottle was.

“Hmmm. Awesome, Hot stuff won’t go cold and cold stuff won’t get all warm.”

“And that’s not all; it’s got high heat-retentive properties so you won’t really feel anything at all. So even if you put boiling hot tea in there it won’t feel hot and if you put something cold in you won’t see any condensation on it at all.”

“Wow, that’s handy.”

“Yeah, it is, but Iuli, I think that’s the most frightening thing about it.”

“Huh? Frightening?” asked Iuli as he tilted his head in confusion.

“You can’t tell if what’s inside is boiling or freezing even if you touch the container, you know? Do you have the courage to drink what’s inside?” To this Iuli said nothing.

“That’s why ‘Magic Bottle’ is that thing’s name.” Once he said this the look on Julius’s face seemed different from before. If nothing else that was what it looked like to Iuli. The man who always had a fearless smile on his face had a smile of self-derision on his face today. After that Julius did not say another word. In the end Iuli did not understand his metaphor at all and did not get the chance to ask him about it. It was right after this conversation that Julius had left the two siblings.

“You’re already leaving, aren’t you... I’m a little sad.” Once Iuli brought Seria to the café they felt it was a good time to leave and so decided to do so. With their bill paid Lucia even went as far as to see them off at the entrance. Lowering her head with its sad expression and looking up with an anxious look in her eyes. If she acted like this anyone would find himself having trouble leaving... But such was not the case for Iuli.

“So that’s it. That’s how you get people to come again, huh?” Iuli commented

“Ahaa, was I that obvious?” replied Lucia as her attitude was completely turned on its head and playfully stuck her tongue out a little. It looked as though she had completely adapted herself to the Human World. She had become an outstanding poster girl for the café.

“Do you honestly intend to continue living like this?” asked Yukiha who was standing beside Iuli. Speaking in a tone that reminded Lucia about just what her situation was.

“Yes, well, I don’t intend to continue working here forever. If I find myself a better paying job I think I would go for it.” Lucia’s answer was exceedingly casual. All of the tension in Yukiha’s shoulders just left as she was so taken aback.

“I won’t say anything more on the matter so do your best to stay on your toes.”

“What’s thiiis? Are you worried about me? You’re so kind, Yukiha.”

“Wha-?! Tha-That’s not it! I just don’t like how relaxed you are!”

“I will be all right. It is true that in terms of fighting my powers have been severely diminished but I should be able to handle myself against most opponents. If someone a little more powerful comes attacking me, though, I would be in trouble,” Lucia went on as she then directed her gaze at Iuli.

“But when that happens I will have Iuli to protect me.”

“Me?”

“You don’t want to?”

“Well, I guess I could.”

“Uhu, thank you, Know that if you do protect me I will be sure to sure to thank you with an even more amazing service, uhu,” said Lucia as she smiled happily and leaned forward emphasizing her already abundant bust all the more. Due to the openness of the outfit around her chest the seductive power of her pose was altogether catastrophic.

“A-An even more amazing service?”

“You’re staring at her too much, Iuli!”

“Oh, no... Calm down, Yukiha, It’s not like she can help it. Her breasts have done nothing wrong.”

“Uuu! Wh-Who cares about those things! They are nothing but fat!” Iuli was all distressed and Yukiha’s face was becoming redder and redder by the minute. Seeing the two of them panicking like this Lucia couldn’t help but smile at them. Seria, on the other hand, silently looked up at Lucia and then quietly moved behind Luli. She then turned around so their backs were to each other. From there she bent her knees and leaned over.

“Seria Hip Attack!” said Seria as she screamed a strange attack name and she sprung towards Iuli, her tiny butt colliding with his.

“Huuuh?!” It was in that shock of the moment that Iuli found himself stumbling a great distance forward. The result then was that he found himself on a collision course with the very same alluring cleavage that caught his eyes earlier. With a squish Iuli came to feel something exceedingly soft, his brain unable to think of anything but how sweet the sensation was. His face was softly enveloped by Lucia’s large, supple

breasts. In any case, they were soft, squishy, jiggly and to top it off they had a great scent about them. What's more, his hands instinctively shot out in front of him so as to break his fall and, as a result, found himself groping her breasts with both of hands.

"Heh? Ah... N-" Lucia had become rigid as though time had stopped for her but it looked as though she was finally able to react.

"Nooooooooooooo!" and just like that Lucia landed an incredibly punch right in the center of Iuli's face.

"Guhuu," went Iuli as he found himself bending backwards without meaning to. Though Iuli had unbelievable defensive powers the one thing they would let in was a woman's bare hands. Even though it wasn't a proper punch with very little strength behind it the punch hit him right at the tip of his nose so it hurt quite a bit.

"Uuu," moaned Lucia as her cheeks were colored red with shame. Just a few seconds earlier Iuli was enveloped in her alluring cleavage and just the thought of it made her want to cover her face with both hands. She then looked to Iuli with rage in her eyes,

"Don-Don't get so mad, Lucia... It's not what you think, that was an accident just now. Seria I think just-"

"Yes, it was all my doing," cut in a young, cheerful voice. Seria then popped up from behind Iuli's back and stood before Lucia.

"Huhuhn, well, how do I say it... I just felt the urge to tease you a little," said the girl as she gave Lucia a mischievous grin to which Lucia scowled at her. However, Seria's smile did not falter in the slightest.

“Even though you do not have any experience whatsoever you are giving everything you have so as to appear that you do. Somehow it just makes me smile.” Lucia looked as though she was about to panic but then stifled her panic as best she could as she then then went on to ask, “wha-what are you basing that on?”

“I am sorry to say this but I can tell by your scent,” answered Seria as she pointed to her prized nose with her finger.

“You are the complete opposite of someone acting innocent, aren’t you? You are a quasi-slut acting as though you have a wealth of experience. Does something like that have anything to do with your pride as a Witch? Huhu, I see you are a pseudo-erotic just like Nii-sama.”

“Like I said, don’t go making up new words like that. They’ll end up sticking,” interrupted Iuli as he was rubbing the tip of his nose. After that his gaze then turned towards Lucia.

“So she doesn’t have any experience either, huh,” thought Iuli. In truth, he was not all that surprised. He certainly had a feeling that was the case but he also felt that her lewd statement sounded somewhat forced.

“I’m not saying that I’m convinced, but… If Seria says she is then there’s really no doubt about it. I see, so she really is a virgin. I see, I see,” thought Iuli as he looked on at Lucia while thinking naughty things. Lucia, on the other hand, bowed her head and began to tremble.

“I-” a moment later she raised her head up with great force and gave everything she had to say this one line all while her face was bright red.

“I-I-I-I’m no virgin!” Once she said this she suddenly turned around and ran straight into the café. Then there was silence. The air became incredibly heavy. As Iuli could not help but feel sorry for Lucia he then went on to glare at Seria who was standing at his elbow.

“Huhuhn, now I have gotten back at her. Nii-sama, if I did not go this far with the women who looked at you as amorously as she did then nothing bad will happen.” There was virtually no sign of remorse in his little sister’s eyes but a look of pure joy could be seen instead.

Cleaning the dishes, cleaning the store, checking the registers, sorting the receipts, once all this, as well as taking out the garbage, was done would Lucia’s part-time job for the day truly be over.

“Haaa, I’m exhausted,” Lucia sighed as she leaned her back against the wall in the back alley right after throwing away a garbage bag. With a moan, she looked up as she stretched her arms and saw a beautiful starry night sky above her. The time was a quarter past nine. Her shift was to be until nine however she worked even fifteen minutes past that. This however, she learned, was a common practice in the Human World. Even if her shift had ended it would be perceived as strange if she left work right on time.

“This is so annoying. Haaa, working is so annoying.” With the customers gone there was no need to continue smiling as she did when the café was open. Lucia looked to be utterly dissatisfied as she said these words.

“It looks as though I was wrong in choosing this café just because of their cute uniforms.” When she laid eyes on the café’s uniform as she was walking through the city it was love at first sight.

“Aaaahn, I knew it, it fits me perfectly,” said a satisfied Lucia when she actually got to put it on but later found herself greatly dissatisfied with her duties and the pay she would receive for performing them. As someone who lived as one of the strong in the Demon World she never

had to live working under anybody and, even now, she just could not get used to the idea now.

“Well, I guess I just have to put up with it for now,” she thought to herself. What occupied her mind was the other factor she had to contend with in regards to working at the café, the factor known as the customer that had just left known as Seria Asagami.

“That little wench,” she thought to herself. It was because of her that she was all but humiliated. Though she swore that she would get her revenge on her there was something else she could not help but be curious about. It was something that she had said.

“The way she was able to tell I was virgin just from my scent... It is almost as though she were a vampire.” Vampires, as their name suggests, are monsters that feast on blood and, by nature, are incredibly sensitive to the scent of blood. There are even those who can tell whether someone is a virgin or not just by their scent.

“But... telling whether or not a human is a virgin is one thing but telling whether or not a Witch is something... Those only high ranking vampires who have sucked Witch’s blood can do... Seria Asagami... Just who is she?” Lucia pondered to herself.

“Wait, this is stupid. It’s obvious she was just trying to make me confess,” said Lucia in a dull grumble as she left the garbage disposal area. She rushed as to get out of the back alley as quickly as possible but it was then that three shadows appeared before her without warning. All three wore black robes that seemed to melt into the darkness as they completely blocked the way out of the back alley. Lucia then stopped herself and got herself in a defensive stance right away.

“What’s going on? Who are you people? Are you stalkers?” said Lucia as she talked loosely. Lucia then went from a defensive position to a fighting position. She knew instinctively that who she was facing were not humans at all. The eerie aura they were letting off was a special characteristic of magic beings. One shadow then stepped forward and silently opened her mouth.

“It is I, Lucia-sama,” said the shadow as she removed her hood to reveal the young woman underneath. Her long hair then came spilling out and one could see that it was an eccentric mix of many colors. Around her cheeks and neck the color of her hair then became crimson.

“You’re... Malta?! What are you doing here?” Lucia knew her. She was a Witch who was in the same faction as she was. To Lucia she was her “right hand” and was, as well, one of the most trusted subordinates she had.

“I have come for you,” stated Malta in a solemn tone.

“Lucia-sama... What is someone of your standing doing in a place like this? You have even... Gone so far as to dress as a waitress as you pretend to serve guests at this establishment.”

“You think I am pretending? I do quite like this outfit, though. It’s cute, right?” said Lucia as she smiled mockingly at the woman standing before her. In so doing the look on Malta’s face became all the more bitter.

“Please come back, Lucia-sama. We have need of you. We need a queen on the throne,” said her former subordinate as she pleaded for her return.

“Of the three great witches you are the only one who can lead our faction, ‘Babylonia.’ You who are worshipped for all the thousands of soldiers and beasts at your command all due in part to your ‘Babylon,’ Lucia von Elde Fern.” The two of them discussed things at length but in the end the woman known as Malta, as well as the two who accompanied her, vanished from the back alley.

Almost as though they were melting into the darkness and not leaving a trace of themselves behind. All that remained was Lucia who silently closed her eyes and simply looked up at the sky. Her crimson lips then opened slightly and let out something that was akin to a sigh. Shortly thereafter she returned to the café and darkness returned to the back alley once again.

Chapter 2: A Certain Researcher’s Overdrive

After school had ended, one can see a great many students heading to one of the academy’s numerous training facilities. All of these special training areas, including “Space,” were made so as to encourage all students who wished to join the Knight Squad a place to practice no matter the time of day. Even more so now as the season for the ranking matches drew ever closer. It is during times like these where the students go all out in their training. Naturally for Yukiha Kudoin, holder of the 1st rank at the academy, she was no exception.

“Prison,” said Yukiha in the training room, gripping her rapier with one hand as she spoke a small incantation. In so doing all the broken shards of ice in the air stopped in midair. As though time itself had stopped. Such was the nature of Yukiha Kudoin’s Artifact known as “Diamond Dust.” She was able to freely manipulate the ice shards that filled the air like snow with her mana. Shards that is able to cut through flesh. If she had them converge on a single point they would be able to bore through

solid steel. Even by just having the shards remain in place in midair she's able to seal the movements of her opponents.

"Uwhoa... That was close!" said Iuli as he kicked the manmade floor in an effort to avoid her web of ice shards but then panicked and suddenly stopped as he found more in front of him. The ice shards that seemed to fall and drift through the air like flower petals all then stopped perfectly in midair. If one was to describe the scene it was as if one had knives drawn on them in every conceivable direction. One move and grave injury was unavoidable. Not only was movement impossible but not even the smallest movements, such as moving a finger, could be done without risking great injury. Within the cage of colorless, the transparent shards sealed the enemy's movements perfectly.

"Heeeh, so you had a technique like this, too, huh."

"It is one of my secret techniques," declared Yukiha proudly as she had Iuli completely surrounded by her ice shards that were suspended in midair.

"It would be in poor taste if you thought my Artifact was nothing more than a weapon that can only cut."

"So you have them hanging in midair like this and your enemies just run to their deaths, huh. You really thought this one out!" said Iuli as Yukiha then pointed the tip of her rapier at him.

"Know the fear of being unable to move and having to remain absolutely still. Once this prison of sharp magic ice shards surrounds you and impedes your path not one person can escape from-"

"Pururururu," came the sound of Iuli's phone as it rang with its loud ringtone and interrupting Yukiha.

“Ah, sorry, Yukiha, Time out for a sec, my phone’s ringing,” said Iuli as he went straight for his phone after hearing it ring. Ignoring the perfectly still ice shards in midair as they snapped against his body, he went to his bag in the corner of the training room to get his phone.

“Let’s see. It’s from Seria. She says there was a sale on toilet paper so she got some for me, too… Hahaa, that little sister of mine’s always so thoughtful,” stated Iuli as he then went on to send her a random text and then faithfully returned to his position, Snapping more shards against his body in the process and completely ignoring them.

“Sorry to keep you waiting. Now, bring it!” Yukiha was at a loss for words. She just stiffened up in her pose pointing her rapier at him. The expressions on her face the same as ice shards were completely frozen.

“So, what were you saying? I think it was something about a prison of sharp magical ice shards or something.”

“Ju-Just forget it!”

“Eh? But I don’t get the whole ‘Know the fear of being unable to move and having to remain absolutely still,’ yet… I haven’t really known it yet.”

“I said forget about it! Let us move on already! On to the next part!” said Yukiha, her face red with anger as she undid “Prison.” The ice shards then resumed their aimless drifting through the air and Yukiha prepared for her next move. However…

“Haaa!”

“Alley-oop,” said Iuli as he beat down her attack.

“I will not let you escape! ‘Claymore’ !”

“Whoa,” said Iuli once more as he jumped out of the way of the attack.

“I have you now. You are jumping to your own demise. I have already prepared an ‘Ice Coffin’ for you as a four-part strategy to-”

“Hmpf,” grunted Iuli as he shrugged off the magic trap she had set for him with his own fighting spirit.

“I-I am not done yet!” After that Yukiha continued to attack with a wide variety of attacks as well as show off the powers of her “Diamond Dust” to their fullest extent. However, regardless of what she did, the result was the same. She just could not break through Iuli’s unnaturally high “defenses.” Regardless of how long she kept trying she seemed to have no hope of even scratching him.

“I cannot stand this, you fool!” yelled Yukiha as she finally snapped. Throwing her rapier to the ground with everything she had and began to wail in grief. Once the rapier left her hand it reverted back to its original form.

“This won’t amount to any sort of training at all! Even fighting a wall would be more beneficial than this!”

“Oioi, don’t blow your top like that,” said Iuli as he picked up her Artifact, now a short sword, and brought it back to her.

“You’re the one who asked me to be your training partner, remember?”

“Uuu… That may be so, but,” answered Yukiha albeit timidly and with some reluctance. That day after school she asked Iuli to be her training partner. He had to repay her for going shopping with him and Seria so he was only too happy to oblige her. Such was how the two of them came to be in the same training room sparring with one another.

During this time of year all of the training areas become so crowded with students that the remainder ended up training in the mountains near the academy. However, what with Yukiha's #1 ranking in the academy, she had the right to prioritize the use of a vast majority of the training areas the academy had to offer.

"I-In any case, as it stands this won't amount to any sort of training at all. I am sorry to ask you this but could you lower your level so as to match mine? If you do not hold back on your defensive and evasive moves to some degree this training won't be going anywhere." To this Iuli said nothing but had a slightly surprised look on his face.

"Hm? What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing... I'm just a little surprised. This is a complete 180 from what you asked me last time." There was one time, shortly before, where Iuli and Yukiha faced off against one another. It was a fight within the training area known as "Space." Iuli had lost as he had stepped off the stone slab they fought atop on which was the losing condition but Yukiha, frustrated at the result of the battle, reproached him and told him to fight her seriously. In spite of that though, today she asked him to "lower his level" as well as "hold back."

"If that's what you want then I'll hold back as much as you want, but... Are you okay with that?"

"It matters not to me," replied Yukiha giving an immediate answer to which Iuli was not prepared for at all and was taken aback by it.

"What brought this on?" he asked her.

"What? All I did was rid myself of my tedious obstinacy and pride," Yukiha answered with a bitter smile on her face as her gaze then fell to her hands.

“I am weak, much weaker than you. This is an irrefutable fact and this is the first thing I had to accept if I wished to become stronger. Pointless envy and hostility will only serve to hinder my growth.” Iuli said nothing but continued listening to her.

“It all depends on one’s perspective. You are someone of unbelievable strength that by coincidence just so happened to be near me. Such a chance would be a complete and utter waste if I did not use it. As such I will be putting that monstrous strength of yours to good use as long as I see fit,” continued Yukiha as she showed off her signature smile.

It was a sarcastic, obstinate smile but it was not a guilty one. It was a refreshingly positive, in fact. The feeling of impatience he felt before from her was all but gone. However, her being “hungry” for strength had not disappeared at all. On the contrary it had grown even stronger. So much so it was beyond simply coveting or rationalizing. She craved strength.

“Oooh? Nice. Women should at least be that strong,” said Iuli with a mischievous grin to which Yukiha accepted as she cocked her head and returned the smile right back at him.”

“To be strong is to have strength in one way or another. For myself to have been intelligent enough to realize what I had to do is another form of ‘strength’ as well.”

“Okay. I now have a clear picture of your intentions and motives,” said Iuli with a bright, cheery voice. For her to make him parts of her plans and take advantage of him as well as to be honest enough to tell him, Iuli could not help but enjoy it.

“If that’s how it is then I’ll do it. I, Iuli Asagami, will submit to you.”

* * *

One hour later.

“All right, Shall we take a break?” The instant Iuli said that Yukiha’s hips then collapsed to the ground. The tension had been broken and so all her strength ended up leaving her.

“Haa... Haa... Haa,” panted Yukiha, Her breathing in disarray. Sweat dripping from her cheeks. Even though they had only trained for an hour her strength, energy and mana were surprisingly low.

“He will submit to me?” thought Yukiha, “hmpf, what a thing to say.” It was neither licking play nor bondage play but submission play. As far as Iuli’s declaration was concerned his movements were nothing short of perfect. Power, speed, agility, flexibility... He restrained himself to make all of these factors one level higher than Yuiha’s. He made sure to defend against her attacks and made sure all of his own weren’t at full power. It looked as though he was able to master and gain full control of his unbelievable mana.

The choker around his neck that sealed his vast stores of mana helped to some degree but it was still amazing that he could hold himself back to such an extent. He was able to manipulate the strongest power the world had ever seen and flawlessly control it so it matched Yukiha’s own. If this was not submission then just what else could it be? It was thanks to this that Yukiha was able to gain invaluable experience. The benefits of fighting someone slightly stronger than herself were exceedingly great.

“I heard about it from Master, but... Could this be how he would do things?” Iuli wondered to himself.

“Here,” said Iuli as he tossed Yukiha a drink from the corner of the room. Once Yukiha caught it she took the lid off and satiated her thirst.

“What do you want to do? Want to call it a day?” asked Iuli.

“What are you talking about? We have only just started,” answered Yukiha as she put her hand to her knee and stood herself up. Her stamina was already near its limits but seeing as how she had Iuli was taking the opportunity to spar with her she felt she could not throw in the towel just yet.

“You’re really into it, huh... Is it because the ranking matches are not too far away?”

“That’s right,” answered Yukiha briefly as she was short of breath and so went on to nod.

“With or without the ranking matches I don’t intend to label people as strong or weak based on how often they train, but... I do plan on putting a little more effort into it for the time being. I do have my pride as 1st rank, after all,” At present Yukiha had the highest rank of 1st in the academy.

“At the time I ended up saying that I was not interested in Sagai-senpai’s 1st rank ‘title’ but... That was only tit for tat and I, personally, have an attachment to my current status.”

“And that’s to... Join the Knight Squad, huh?” asked Iuli to which Yukiha quietly nodded. It was Yukiha’s hope to join the Knight Squad as quickly as possible. The reason being was because she wanted to go on one of the Demon World expeditions that the Knight Squad regularly went on and search for her mother who went missing. Such was Yukiha’s goal.

Under normal circumstances one could only join the Knight Squad after graduating from a training institute but there have been instances where one can join even sooner like Io Kagihara did. If one had talent then the

idea of joining before graduation was not a hopeless dream. Yukiha Kudoin was strong, her strength already well beyond that of a normal student's.

As long as she continued as she has been there was no doubt that she would be allowed to join the Knight Squad. In addition there was Himitsu Crowley, the headmaster as well as captain of the Gouma Knight Squad, who would recommend her as well. However, with her mother missing, she did not have the luxury of waiting until graduation.

“At the ranking matches there will be many people watching including many executive members of the Knight Squad. That being the case I could not possibly allow them to see a disgraceful performance on my part.”

“So in other words it’s the perfect chance for you to show them what you’re made of, huh.”

“To be precise that is more of a minimum condition than anything else. If I pale in comparison to the others at the ranking matches I would have no right to join the Knight Squad.” She first had to hold her ranking of 1st. Such was the goal she set from even before she moved on to the next grade and joined the high school section.

“I gotcha. I now have a good idea of just how resolved you are. That said there’s something I want to ask you,” said Iuli as his face then turned grim and severe.

“Yukiha, are you sick or something?”

“What?”

“It’s about the sparring we did today... To be honest, it feels like you were stronger when I fought you before. When I fought you in ‘Space’

your movements were a lot better.” Upon hearing this Yukiha looked upon Iuli with a look of worry on her face.

“Now that you mention it you may be right about that. I do not wish to place the blame on my weaponry but lately my Artifact has been acting poorly,” replied Yukiha, reluctantly, as her gaze then fell to her hand where her Artifact, “Diamond Dust,” had returned to its original form.

“It has?”

“While an Artifact does hold a great deal of power, on the other hand, it is necessary that the Artifact is finely tuned to the user’s power level. Should adjustments not be made on a daily basis then the user will only be able to exhibit half of the Artifact’s power.”

Humanity’s wisdom brought about the mage’s trump card known as the Artifacts. While it is an exceedingly strong weapon that can take shape based on the wielder’s fighting spirit the cost in return is that there is a significantly low number that can be used by everyone.

“I have been making adjustments to it myself, but… I just cannot seem to make it work all that well, If I was to continue making adjustments to it myself… Hmm,” said Yukiha as she pondered for a short while about what she should do.

“Iuli,” she then went on to say, raising her head to look at him, “I am sorry to go back on what I said earlier but let us leave it at this for today’s training.”

“I am thinking of heading to the engineering department.” It was here then that they decided to head to the academy’s engineering department. Before heading there, though, the two of them went to the adhering showering rooms so as to wash off the sweat they worked up from the training. Yukiha was the one who suggested it. The idea of heading to

the engineering department made her want to shower all the more. It was just how she felt.

“Huu,” exhaled Yukiha as she finished washing her body. She then turned the shower knob and the water that was pouring over head just a second earlier had stopped altogether, the drops of water trailing down her slightly cherry-blossom colored skin before eventually falling off.

While letting her moist hair hang she then went about looking over her naked body. The tips of her feet, her moderately firm thighs and hips, her taut waist, she looked all the way down to her feet and then proceeded to look further up.

“Hmmm.” They were not small she thought to herself. They were at sizes that were appropriate for her age. If she were to compare hers to the other girls hers would be considered larger than the rest. However:

“Lu-Lucia’s… are big, aren’t they,” she thought, becoming depressed as she found herself thinking about the Witch and her more than well-endowed breasts. What’s more she found herself remembering Iuli’s face buried in Lucia’s godlike cleavage and this only served to anger her all the more.

“Every time we see Lucia I cannot help but feel that lech is ogling her breasts,” she thought to herself, “are big breasts really that great? They are nothing but lumps of fat.”



“Mine are nothing to scoff at either, so... You could at least look at mine a little,” thought Yukiha who, the moment she thought this, found herself shaking her head violently.

“N-No,” she thought to herself, “ju-just what am I thinking?!”

“Ooooi, Yukihaaa!”

“Uhyaaaaaaaaaaa!” went Yukiha as she ended up letting out an earth-shattering scream at Iuli’s sudden call. Even more so as the very same person calling out to her was the one she was just thinking about.

“Wha-What’s wrong? Why did you scream? Was there a cockroach or something?”

“O-O-Oh, it’s just you, Iuli,” replied Yukiha, Desperately trying to calm her pounding heart. She also found herself fondling her own breasts and, upon realizing this, went about hiding her hands behind her back.

“Wha-What is it?”

“Nothing really it’s just that I was getting tired of waiting. Are you going to be much longer?” asked Iuli, his voice coming from the entrance to the shower room. Though he already finished his shower he decided to wait for her.

“Ju-Just a little longer... However, Iuli, it is embarrassing having you call for me with such a loud voice so I do not do it again, just because there is no one else here it doesn’t mean that it is okay to do.”

“Sorry about that,” said Iuli who, although was apologizing, did not sound like he regretted what he did at all. Such was who Iuli Asagami was.

“Oh yeah, seeing as how we’re here, shall I come in and help you wash up?”

“Wha-Whaaat?!” exclaimed Yukiha as her thoughts overloaded in an instant. In a panic she went about covering her breasts and crotch. She then found herself at a loss about what to do about her butt as she did not have a spare hand to cover it.

“Yo-Yo-You cannot be serious! I-I-I-It is obvious we cannot do that!”

“Haahaahaa, it was just a joke. Don’t take it so seriously.”

“Uuuu!” Yukiha whimpered. After realizing she had fallen for what he had said she could not help but feel a sense of shame and her mind went completely blank.

“Yo-Yo-Yo-You perveeert!” Yukiha screamed in her mind as her shame then turned into anger when she then remembered what Seria told her the other day.

“Tha-That’s right,” Yukiha thought to herself, “the fact that I overreact to what he says... makes him want to tease me all the more.” Based on what Seria said Iuli was all talk and would not do anything.

“If that is so,” Yukiha thought to herself as she prepared herself and took a deep breath. Desperately trying to keep her voice from going shrill, she then calmly went on to say:

“Tha-That’s true, seeing as how we are here why don’t we go in together, Iuli.”

“Uwhaaa-?!” Upon hearing panic in Iuli’s voice Yukiha then took the chance to press him further.

“What is the matter? You were the one who brought it up, weren’t you?”

“Eh... Ah, no, um... Well, just wait a second. No, nonono, ju-ju-just hold on, Ju-Just wait one second.” He was flustered so she could not understand what he was saying. He was shaken. Iuli was shaken. And

she was the one who made him feel that way. What's more she did so by talking dirty which was his specialty.

“Hu, huhu,” Yukiha chuckled in her head, A natural smile breaking out on her face. With her having been able to get back at him Yukiha felt an indescribable feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment. She never would have thought taking control of the situation would feel this great. With Iuli now bewildered Yukiha then went on to say, “it was just a joke. Don’t take it so seriously,” in the exact same, proud, way that Iuli did earlier.

“Guu,” was his only reply. Yukiha could just envision the look of frustration on Iuli’s face.

“I did it. Huhuhuu,” Yukiha thought to herself. A smile coming over her face showing just how much fun she was having. However, just as she did:

“Haa... Hahahahaa. That’s pretty cocky of you, Yukiha,” said Iuli, his voice sounding as though he had a disconcerting smile on his face. So much so that Yukiha felt a chill go down her spine.

“All right! I guess we’ll go in together, huh?!” stated Iuli leaving Yukiha shocked at the sudden turn of events.

“Hahahahaa,” his sporadic laughter continued. He was half-mad... No, he probably convinced himself he had no choice but to oblige her.

“Wa-Wait! Wait, Iuli!”

“Don’t be so modest! You’re the one who asked me in, weren’t you?!” said Iuli as the door to the dressing room rattled open. Yukiha then heard a clacking noise which she then thought was most likely him taking his belt off... She was on the verge of panicking. She then hurriedly tried to

find something to cover her body but she could find none. There was absolutely nothing she could use. At this rate Iuli would end up seeing her completely naked. She was in a real conundrum.

“Wa-Wait... Wait, Iuli... I am not mentally prepared yet... Ah, no! My mental preparedness has nothing to do with this! Thi-Thi-This is nothing but a crime, plain and simple, Iuli!”

“Shut up!”

“Did you think I would do such a thing just because you told me to?!” It was no use. Iuli could no longer be stopped. The price for belittling Iuli’s pride was all too great.

“Uuu... Uuu... Uuuuuu...” with nothing more to do all Yukiha could do was tremble. It was then that Yukiha could hear another voice outside the shower room.

“What are you doing, Asagami?” It was the voice of a very grave sounding woman.

“If memory serves this is the girl’s changing room that leads to the girl’s shower room and yet... Why are you thinking of going in half-naked?”

“Mo-Momo-chan-sensei.”

“That is Instructor Mishima to you.” It was Momo Mishima, Iuli’s homeroom teacher. Although she was beautiful and dignified her gaze was exceedingly sharp. Having a rather strict personality she would go about chastising Iuli a great deal for his happy-go-lucky attitude.

“I-It’s not what you think... It’s not! She was the one who invited me in... Owowow, don’t pull on my hair! I’ll go bald! I’ll go bald! You’ve got it all wrong! She was the one inviting me in! I just forgot myself and then I... Wait, owowowow, you’re going to tear my ear ooooff!” Yukiha

then listened to the sound of rapid footsteps as well as Iuli's cry of "I'm the victim heeere!" as they faded off into the distance.

"Haaa," went Yukiha as she breathed a great sigh of relief as well as go about taking another shower, making the shower slightly colder so as to cool off her body that was burning up. Iuli was then detained for a comparatively short period of time as Momo Mishima lectured and chastised him over how the instructors were busy with the coming ranking matches as well as what Yukiha was going through right now.

"Sheesh, I went through hell because of you, Yukiha."

"Do not try to place the blame on me. It is your own fault that happened to you," said Yukiha as both spoke awkwardly to each other as they headed to the engineering department. Though it was only Yukiha who had business with the engineering department Iuli decided to come along as he had nothing better to do. The "engineering department" was just a generic name for the agency on campus that went about researching magic as well as the development of magic weapons. It is one of many research buildings on the academy's campus where they go about developing the latest magic and magic weaponry.

"Hmmm, so this Renko Minamori is the genius Artifact Creator that made your 'Diamond Dust'?"

"That's right. She is a senior in the high school section and, although she is also a student, she is already at the forefront as a researcher. Others, as well as she, have recognized just how much of a young prodigy she is when it came to the field of Artifact research and it is said that in time she will take charge of the engineering department," said Yukiha, This Renko Minamori apparently having taken good care of her since they were in the high school section together.

“A researcher, huh, I guess there are other students here going that way, huh. There are people taking research classes so we don’t really need to take it, huh.”

“That may be so but being classified as a researcher does not necessarily restrict one to a life of only research. There are those who master the scholastic and martial arts as well... But there are only so many of them who have succeeded. For example, one of the Seventh Heaven Knights, Mariel Lloyds, not only boasts exceptional fighting prowess but has also made many achievements in the field of magic research. The academy’s Mystery Circle was also based on his original design,” A prodigy who mastered both paths, Mariel Lloyds. Even for someone as aloof as Iuli when it came to the world of magic even he knew that name.

“Now that I think about it, master specialized in both, too, huh. He made a whole bunch of things including the ‘Magic Bottle’,” Iuli thought to himself. As Julius was a man who did not affiliate himself with anyone, naturally, he did not receive any assistance at all. That being the case his maintaining as well as developing of Artifacts was all done by him and him alone.

“Well, either way, I’m looking forward to this,” stated Iuli.

“Well this is a surprise. I never would have thought you were this interested in Artifacts. Let me just tell you this now but it is impossible for you to make your own Artifact. The only ones allowed to make them at the very least have to be B Rank or higher. If one is to specialize in developing them then one needs a certain level of success in the fie—”

“It’d be nice if she was cute,” Iuli interrupted, Leaving Yukiha silent, as she then brought her hand to her forehead as though confirming that Iuli’s suspicions were correct. Walking some ways more they eventually found themselves at the engineering department. Whether it was because

of how inorganic the building looked among the trees surrounding it no one could say for sure but it looked exceedingly convoluted. Yukiha then guided Iuli through the opening of the building. Going deeper and deeper inside found them before a square building. It looked like a box one would expect to carry a cake inside but made many times bigger. Nothing but a boring white cube, pure and simple, it was completely unembellished but it had infrared sensors and surveillance cameras about it.

“This is Minamori’s research building.”

“So she has her own research building, huh. That’s just awesome.” As Yukiha drew closer a door then opened on its own. It was apparently a door that could only be opened from the inside. Seemingly used to it Yukiha then went inside with Iuli following after.

“Minamori-senpai, it’s Yukiha Kudoin,” said Yukiha as she walked right down the hallway to the room she was looking for. The room was exceedingly dark. Though it was quite large there were no windows either. Within one could find various research equipment and electronics scattered about it so one could not help but feel a sense of claustrophobia.

“Minamori-senpai. Minamori-senpai! This is strange.”

“Is she out?”

“If she was then the door would not have possibly opened. Is she in her inner laboratory?” Yukiha wondered to herself. Her eyes darting about the room and just as she was about to progress further inside-

“Yukiha-chan, long time no see!” said a figure that suddenly appeared behind her and hugged her.

“Oh you, you, you! It’s been so long! I was lonely, you know.

“Mi-Minamori-senpai?! S-So you were here... Hyaaa! Sto-Stop. Ahahahaa... Haaau! N-Nooo.” Thanks to the decorative plants near the door the girl, Renko Minamori, was able to surprise Yukiha and was now letting her hands go all over Yukiha’s body. As they went to her armpits, buttocks as well as the nape of her neck one could hear Yukiha make noises akin to panting. In time her devilish hands then rested at Yukiha’s breasts.

“Hahaa, I see your breasts are as outrageous as ever. They are not too big or too small... I just can’t get enough of how they fit right into me hand.”

“Ple-Ple-Please sto- Haa... Aah... Huuu.” Renko’s hands continued to go about Yukiha’s body and in so doing Yukiha’s resistance became weaker by the minute. Her face became a bashful one and her voice became heated.

“Ple-Please cease this at once!” said Yukiha as she mustered all the strength she could to shake off Renko Minamori from her back. Perhaps it was due to her lack of strength or stamina but Renko Minamori was sent flying. Saying “oh nooo” as she flew.

“Haa... Haa,” Yukiha panted, quickly straightening out her disheveled outfit her breathing helter skelter. In so doing Yukiha then slowly lowered herself to the ground while Renko laughed. Clearly amused.

“Ah-ah, that’s too bad. A little more and I would have been able to take your bra off.”

“I know. You were so close, too,” Iuli added.

“Iuli. Why are you acting so disappointed?” questioned Yukiha with a sharp look in her eyes. Upon seeing this Iuli’s gaze then transferred to Renko.

“Minamori-senpai... I do not know just how many times I have told you but this is without a doubt sexual harassment.”



“It’s fine, isn’t it? We’re good friends and all,” said Renko Minamori with a delightful grin on her face while on the other hand Yukiha looked exhausted. They seemed to be quite close. This extreme skinship might just be how they greeted each other for all Iuli knew. Once again, Iuli stared right at Renko. She had a good face but with her thick, dowdy glasses he did not get the impression that she was all that beautiful. She wore nothing but work clothes with no embellishment or decoration and her hair in a simple ponytail. She apparently had no interest in how she appeared to others whatsoever.

“If she tried a little I’m sure she’d look like a real beauty but it’s such a waste,” Iuli thought, looking disappointed, and it was at this moment that Renko looked in his direction.

“So, who’s he?”

“I’m Iuli Asagami, a freshman, and I’m just tagging along with Yukiha.”

“I see. I’m Renko Minamori, nice to meetcha,” said Renko with a slight inflection. Judging from her sexual harassing of Yukiha it seemed that she had a rather uninhibited personality.

“So Iuli or whatever your name was... What are you to Yukiha-chan? What is your relationship?”

“Hohoo, that’s a tough question. Just hearing about our relationship will make everybody cry. Our relationship’s so deep even talking about it will-”

“He is just a friend,” said Yukiha flatly.

“A friend? Aah, then are you that rumored D Rank boy?!?”

“Uh, yeah, that’s probably me.”

“Minamori-senpai... What do you mean by ‘rumored’ ?” asked Yukiha to which Renko had a satisfied grin on her face.

“What do YOU mean? Isn’t it obvious, the rumor that you got a boyfriend, Yukiha-chan.”

“Whaaat!?” exclaimed Yukiha, taken aback.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-Why is such a rumor spreading!?”

“Why you ask? Yukiha-chan, it’s better for you in the long run if you realized just how famous you are, you know? Even though you’re in your freshman year in the high school section you were talented enough to get 1st rank. You’re regarded as one the most beautiful fighting mages, you know? They even call you “Persephone.” As far as this place is concerned there isn’t anybody who doesn’t know your name and everyone’s got their eyes on you.”

“D-Do you really think so?” said Yukiha as she had a bewildered look come over her face. It seemed as though she had barely any idea of just how famous she was. Even Iuli who had just transferred to the academy could sense that people around her were watching her. Her unawareness probably being due to the goal she had set for herself. It was due to her striving for greater strength that she was becoming less and less aware of her surroundings.

“But for you to go for this D Rank Boy of all people,” said Renko with a hint of disappointment in her voice as she stared intently at Iuli. Once she had finished looking over him she then turned to Yukiha and said, “are you into useless men?”

“Li-Like I said... This boy is not my-“

“O-hooo... I wonder about that... A goodie two shoes like you might have a thing for bad boys... I couldn’t be more sad, Yukiha-chan.”

“Please listen to me!” said Yukiha as she raised her voice to which Renko shrugged her shoulders.

“I got it already. Don’t get so mad. So, what do you want, Yukiha-chan? Then again there’s only one reason you would come here, huh.” Once Renko said this Yukiha then pulled out her Artifact from the holster at her waist. Renko then took it in her hands and looked it over at various angles. Her gaze so serious and intense it made her goofy attitude earlier seem like a lie. She was apparently the type who could effortlessly switch between the two.

“Both the blade and core seem to be undamaged. Hmm... It doesn’t look like it has broken down or anything. From what I can tell it doesn’t look like there’s anything wrong.”

“I cannot explain it all that well, but... My transferring mana to the core is not going as smoothly as before. Forming magic circles as well as manipulating the shards of ice have also become one second slower.”

“The transferring of mana, huh... If that is so there might be some damage to the core. One can assume that it is either the integrated circuit or the core itself in this instance,” said Rinko as she tilted her head in contemplation.

“But, this is weird; “Diamond Dust” doesn’t have a fixed form so there are bound to be instances when it would be hard to transfer mana, but... That’s why I gave it everything I had when I made it so that wouldn’t happen. I didn’t just start with the integrated circuits I even worked on the elementary mana particles, too, you know,” said Renko as she continued on. Iuli only understanding half of what she was talking about.

Iuli himself did at least have basic knowledge but he found he could not keep up with everything Renko was saying. Renko then thought to herself and then went on to say:

“Hmmm, okay... Now then, Yukiha-chan, could you please go to the room next door and get yourself measured? You’ve done it lots of times before so you know the drill, right? I’ll be here busting this open and seeing what I can do.” Once told what to do Yukiha then headed to the room next door. Now all that remained in the laboratory was Iuli and Renko.

“Get measured? Is she going to take down her height and weight?”

“That’s right,” answered Renko lightly as she began working on the Artifact, lining up her pliers and drivers on the table in front of her.

“When you get right down to it all Artifacts are completely made-to-order. It’s not like there aren’t any universal Artifacts that everyone can use but without factoring in the person’s height, weight, body type, amount of body fat, muscle, mana as well as other things they won’t be able to exhibit 100% of their power,” said Renko as she continued on.

“Physical data aside it’s necessary to set the use and nature of the Artifact as well. For example, ‘Diamond Dust’ here was made using Ice and Snow Magic... There we go,” said Renko as she had then separated the core and blade before Iuli even realized it. She was surprisingly skilled. Though he started to watch over her shoulder right after doing this he had no idea what she was doing at all. Once he did, however, she had already finished dismantling it. Renko then took the core into her hand and with it came the code that was attached to it. A graph then appeared on one of her monitors and she stared at it as she was typing on her keyboard.

“There are three things that make up the core of a magic implement. One is the Latter Phase Remeto that focuses on power output. The second is the Haerzepen Converter as well as the Lloyds-type Multi-Bypass. Then finally is the Grackt Attenuater that assists the whole process. The rest I will leave to you to find out on your own.”

“No,” Iuli thought, “I don’t get it. I don’t get it at all.” Be it either what she said or what she was doing with her hands Iuli did not understand a single thing.

“Uuuuh, if I remember right, an Artifact is-” thought Iuli as he wracked his brain for all he could remember on Artifacts so as to better understand what was happening in front of him. For the most part, Artifacts are made up of two parts. The blade and the core, the blade’s exterior almost always made of “hihirogane,” a special rare metal that will not only change shape but its very nature as well when infused with mana. The reason why the section was called the “blade” was because most of the original forms of Artifacts were small blades.

The core in a magic implement is, as the name suggests, inside the Artifact. It is at the very heart of the weapon and would be considered the control center for it. It is here that the formation of the magic circle as well as the “trigger” that activates the Artifact takes place. What’s more, as hihirogane is an unstable metal, the core is equipped with devices to help control it. These two parts are what make up the basic structure of an Artifact. This is where Artifacts came to be known as “a combination of wand and sword.”

“And I guess that’s all I know,” Iuli concluded to himself. This was nothing more than basic knowledge. To begin with he could not wield Artifacts, much less magic implements all that well so it would go to show he would not have any further knowledge either.

“And that’s why it’s so important to pay attention to ‘Diamond Dust’s’ speed settings. By having all three parts working together the processing speed is improved and one would be able to use spells up to level 4 without having to use a chant. The recoil has been reduced to a bare minimum as well so the lag between casting and recasting is exceedingly short. She said she wanted to be both vanguard and rear guard so Yukiha-chan is really asking me a lot here- Hey... Are you listening to me, Iuli-kun?”

“Eh? Ah, yeah... Sorry what you were talking about was just a little over my head so I just ended up spacing out.”

“Are you kidding me? I feel like I shouldn’t have bothered talking at all,” said Renko as her face was a mix of both a pout and a bitter smile.

“Well, I guess there’s no helping it, huh, When a researcher finds their specialty they just end up with the bad habit of going on and on about it. Sorry about that.”

“You must like them a lot, huh. Artifacts, I mean.”

“Pretty much,” answered Renko with a blissful nod while she was still working.

“Iuli-kun, I’m sure you already know this but Artifacts were made in an effort to create a Witch’s ‘Original Sin’ . No matter how far we’ve come they will be nothing more than copies.” Each Witch is able to use a unique magic that no other Witch can use. The name of this magic is known as an “Original Sin.”

What makes Witches so strong are their enormous stores of mana as well as their monopoly over this kind of magic. In response, humans brought about devices that would enable them to at least create an imitation of that power and came to be called “Artifacts.” Their development came about in a similar way to how people observed birds to later develop

airplanes. In the beginning mages went about researching the vital functions and magic types of Witches which ultimately brought about the development of Artifacts. So, in essence, the secret weapon that the Gouma Knight Squad brought about as a means of boosting their power, if one thought about it in another way was nothing more than a weapon that imitated a Witch's power.

"But you know, Iuli-kun, making Artifacts to me is just so much fun I cannot help myself. This whole thing of pretending to be Witches... About how a copy can't win against an original... I want to try and blow that theory out of the water," said Renko.

"When it comes to the system that planes use it was based on what was seen in birds and how they gained lift with their wings. But you know, planes are now able to fly even higher than birds, right? They're able to fly higher and go even faster than them. So that means that it is not impossible for a copy to beat the original," said Renko as her eyes sparkled all the more with the light of curiosity and inquiry.

"A copy beating an original, huh," Iuli thought to himself. When he thought about it he thought that very thing might be what will lead to humanity's victory. Mages are nothing more than people who use magic. Even when they were not one of the magic races that use magic, they just copy it and make it their own.

"It's a lot of fun, you know. The whole idea of a copy beating an original is one of the things that we in the scientific community get a real thrill out of. Making an Artifact that doesn't even bat an eye to a Witch's 'Original Sin' is my dream," as she said what she was saying, her eyes wandered to a certain part of the room. Following her gaze Iuli found himself looking at a pile of countless weapons. There were swords, spears, bows, the list went on. All of them more than likely Artifacts and

all were just piled together. Though there was, however, one that stood out. While all the other Artifacts were just lying about in a random pile this one Artifact seemed to be on a pedestal as though it were some kind of national treasure. It was a pitch-black long sword that was cloaked in an eerie aura and it was one that Iuli remembered seeing.

“That’s...”

“Huhuhn, so you do know about it, huh. That was the one little weapon I made that got me the closest to making my dream come true,” said Renko happily and excitedly.

“It belongs to history’s youngest member of Seventh Heaven, Io Kagihara. That’s his Raven Artifact, ‘Fenris Wolf.’” It was immediately after she said this that Yukiha returned to the room after she finished measuring herself.

“I finished... Hm? What is it, Iuli? Why do you look so surprised?”

“Look over there,” said Iuli as he pointed at the Raven Artifact which Yukiha’s eyes grew wide upon finding it.

“‘Fenris Wolf’? What is Io-san’s Artifact doing here?”

“It needs to be repaired.”

“It does? How strange. Io-san isn’t one to misuse or damage his Artifact.”

“I know, right? I don’t know the details but I was really surprised, too,” said Renko, the two of them looking on in wonder at the Artifact. Iuli, however, was the only one who knew the truth.

“Ah, it was then,” As Iuli thought he remembered when he pounded Io into the ground the other day.

“But, Minamori-senpai, why are you repairing Io-san’s Artifact? Aren’t Raven Artifacts to be dealt with by researchers specializing in them?”

“Hmmm, that would be true but I WAS the one who made it after all,” said Renko casually. The instant Yukiha heard this, her eyes shot wide open in surprise.

“Re-Really!?”

“Yup. You bet, you bet.”

“Oi, Yukiha, why’re you making such a fuss?

“Because I felt I had to! The making and development of Raven Artifacts are only allowed to those who have been recognized as being at the very top of Artifact production.” Only Seventh Heaven is allowed to use the strongest Artifacts known as “Raven Artifacts.” As they use either a Witch’s “brain” or “heart” as its core which is an exceedingly rare material both the engineers and all personnel involved need to be thoroughly investigated.

“I always thought you would reach that point someday, but… I did not think you were already in charge of making Raven Artifacts.”

“Ahaha, you’re wrong, Yukiha-chan. What I ended up making was something more unique than that. I’ve only been left to take care of just that one and it was only because of Io Kagihara strongly recommending me that I got put in charge of it in the first place.” He strongly recommended her. If that’s so, that meant-

“I see, so you slept your way up the ladder, huh,” said Iuli bluntly.

“Ahaha, watch your mouth, runt,” said Renko with a smile although a throbbing vein could be seen on her head. She was apparently at a loss for words.

“That’s right. Just what are you saying, Iuli?” said Yukiha, shocked at what he just said.

“There is no way Io would do such a thing as recommend someone just for sleeping on a ladder.” At this, there was nothing but silence. Upon hearing Yukiha say such a thing both Iuli and Renko fell completely silent as they then looked to each other. Both able to understand each other just through eye contact:

“This is just how Yukiha is, huh,” Renko’s eyes seemed to convey to which Iuli’s replied, “yup.”

“She’s so cute, isn’t she,” Renko conveyed with her eyes again.

“Yeah. Really cute,” Iuli’s eyes seemed to reply. After that Renko cleared her throat and then returned to what they were talking about.

“Anyway, it’s kind of a long story but… You know about the Witch named Rifosti that came to the Human World a year ago, right?” Iuli then shook his head and Yukiha, seeing this, then explained the event to him.

One year ago, a Witch named Rifosti appeared in Japan. Her appearance spelled disaster to all who saw her. As Witches and Vampires were two of the highest orders of the magic races they are capable of causing a great amount of damage in the Human World. Her appearance was no exception and whether it was her powers or her merely appearing in the Human World no one can say but she did destroy one city. Her power was immense, as one would expect from her being a Witch, the strongest magic race in the Demon World, and brought about great destruction and slaughter. Many of the mages of the Knight Squad sacrificed their lives in their fight against her.

“I ended up getting caught up in that Witch’s fight, you see,” said Renko, in breaking her silence, albeit pensively, she began telling her story, the story about the disaster one year ago as well as the small hero king.

Renko Minamori was on a mission to collect data on some equipment that was still in development. There were also dozens of mages from the Knight Squad on her team but she was able to complete her mission without them. On their return home, however, Renko’s team encountered a Witch.

Rifosti Lea Fleuretlulu.

Such was the name she gave as a smile befitting a demon adorned her face. Renko Minamori did not believe in hell but she found she could not find any other word to describe what she was seeing. Every mage was wiped out except for her. Be it either the ground or the surrounding buildings everything was incinerated, destroyed, and reduced to ash. Even now Rifosti’s objective still remains a mystery. Regardless of her appearance it almost seemed as if she were taking her anger out on them. The way in which she annihilated Renko’s team was brutal and without mercy, Renko then ran for her life but with Rifosti chasing her it was only a matter of time before she caught up. It was at that time that Io Kagihara appeared.

“I-Io...kun?” At the time Io was already a famous prodigy. At the age of ten he had joined the Knight Squad and fought on the front lines. However, he had but one problem: there was not one Artifact in existence that could handle him. His fighting style leaned greatly towards his speed and his body enhancing spells that seemed to run almost indefinitely thanks to his vast stores of mana. However, he did not have an Artifact that could keep up with his swordplay. Many creators had attempted to make Artifacts for him however all of them

became useless after he activated them two or three times. With such being the case Io was in a constant state of frustration.

“Run,” said Io as though bored as he told Renko to run. In his hand Io held a chain and attached to that chain were countless Artifacts all sloppily bound together like firewood which he dragged across the ground as he walked? Renko instinctively knew what he was going to do: He was going to fight using all of the Artifacts at his disposal until they couldn’t be used anymore.

“Wa-Wait! Do you intend to fight with all those?! There is no way you can win!” It is said that not even Seventh Heaven along with their Raven Artifacts could defeat a Witch by on their own. But in spite of that Io intended to face the Witch with Artifacts that weren’t even professionally tuned for him.

“If you’ve got a problem then take it up with Himitsu Crowley. She’s the one who ordered me here. And it’s thanks to her that I’m here scrounging up Artifacts.” Based on what he said it looked as though Io’s solo deployment was a decision made by the Gouma Knight Squad Captain, Himitsu Crowley, and her alone. With the Witch’s sudden assault and the upper echelons of the Knight Squad in chaos Captain Crowley was apparently the only one who kept her composure and issued orders. The very idea of ordering a 12-year-old boy to fight a Witch, however, seemed like something only a madman, or in this case madwoman, would do.

“So that’s the Witch...” said Io with a faint smile on his face. Within his eyes was a gaze as sharp as any knife but they also held a pure light like one would see in a child looking at a new toy.

“Not bad,” he said simply. Right as he said this his body then radiated a mana that had an incredibly powerful bloodlust that seemed to penetrate everything surrounding him.

“Hey, Witch from another world,” the young boy said proudly and defiantly as he walked towards her.

“My name is Io Kagihara. Now, let us have some fun together.” A smile of pure carnage that would send chills down anyone’s spine then came over his face. Seeing this, Rifosti replied in kind as she put on a smile that was befitting of a demon. For an instant the two of them were smiling at each other and then the gauntlet was thrown. Their fight lasted a little under an hour. On one side was Rifosti who spared no expense in using one high class spell after another while Io fought against her using his own speed. One after another he changed his weapon and slashed at her with incredible speed, neither of them holding back at all. Being closer to the fight than anyone Renko could not help but feel fear and horror. In this case not of the Witch, Rifosti, but of the human boy, Io. The reason being was because he was smiling as though he were enjoying himself.

While her heart was in the grips of fear she, at the same time, could not help but admire the way he fought. His skill with the sword was exceedingly delicate and swift. The way he moved almost as though he were performing a blade dance. Even while unleashing a bloodlust rivaling that of a wild beast the way in which he moved his sword was refined and thoroughly calculated. As for Witches they are said to have close to one hundred times the amount of mana a human has. Even if an entire division of mages were to fight a single Witch they would be no match for it. The difference in strength was that overwhelming.

But even in spite of his opponent being a monster with powers beyond all human comprehension the 12-year-old boy was able to match her blow for blow. At this point no one knew who the true monster was. The two monsters just continued to clash and whittle away at each other. Due to Io's fighting style of using Artifacts until they couldn't be used anymore the area was littered with swords thrust into the ground that had lost their usefulness. Even as his blood spurt or his body was slashed nothing could stop him. He just continued on as though devouring something until nothing was left. He just purely and persistently, almost abnormally, drowned himself in the bloodbath that was this fight. Out of the changed, ashen landscape was born a forest of swords. The scene made one think of the Sword-Tree in one of the many hells that Japan believed in. The forest of swords growing one after another like bamboo after the rain as their usefulness had reached their end until finally all that remained was a single beast.

...

Renko was at a loss for words. She was just in awe of the boy's strength. Renko herself had witnessed the historical moment where a human being beat a Witch. That said, however, she could not offer any touching words or breathe a sigh of relief.

Io used everything he had to fight the Witch and now felt completely hollow inside, leaving the now useless Artifacts on the ground as he started to walk. His entire body was covered in wounds that looked brutal and painful, his left hand and right leg seeming to have taken the worst of it. Be it either torn ligaments or broken bones they barely heeded his commands and remained motionless by his sides. Despite all these injuries, though, he still walked as though dragging his body across

the ground as he went about carrying something with him from the battlefield. Rifosti's corpse.

Io had decapitated her. In his right hand was Rifosti's body and, as he could not use his left hand, in his mouth was Rifosti's head which he carried by biting down on her long hair. He carried them near to where Renko was. Once he had, he then violently threw down Rifosti's body as well as let out a puff of air and let Rifosti's head fall. Seeing the head roll Renko could not help but let out a small shriek.

"It was a good fight," said Io in a voice reminiscent of a sigh as he licked the blood from his lips. His gaze then sharpened and shifted to Renko.

"If I remember correctly you're an Artifact Creator, right?"

"Ye-Yeah."

"I got you the greatest materials you could ever ask for, make me something," commanded Io in an arrogant tone reminiscent of a dictator's. The greed in his eyes was already looking forward to "the next thing."

"Make the strongest Raven Artifact for me."

"It was because of that that he became part of Seventh Heaven. He also strongly recommended me and so I was personally chosen to make his Raven Artifact."

"So something like that happened..." even after Renko finished her story Yukiha still showed signs of surprise in her face.

"It was a LOT to take in, though! Being appointed on the spot like that and it's not like I've ever touched a Witch's corpse before or anything. They're like super rare so I couldn't afford to make any mistakes either."

But Renko Minamori succeeded. She made an Artifact for Io Kagihara and she did an outstanding job doing it.

“I have heard that Io-san’s Artifact is incredibly sensitive and that it was created in a rather extreme way.”

“Yes. ‘Fenris Wolf’ is something else. Because when all is said and done most of all of that Raven Artifacts powers is used during ‘Warp’ .”

“Warp” is a movement technique that allows one to leap through time and space. Strictly speaking, though, the name “Warp” is not the name of a type of a magic but a general term for the spell which uses other spells in order to make it work. Not only does one have to have a high proficiency in space-time magic, summoning magic as well as mathematical magic they also have to be able to calculate where it is they want to go. A great deal goes into performing this spell as it is a high-grade magic so the number of people who use it in battle is extremely low.

“His ‘Warp’ is also exceedingly quiet so it makes it all the more effective as well.”

“In this case it’s because of his phenomenal mental speed. It’s thanks to that he is able to activate it in 0.2 seconds and travel as far as 300 meters.” 0.2 seconds, a time that greatly eclipses the original activation time for the spell. What’s more his mind and body was able to keep up with the shortened time. So, in essence, it is possible for Io to move his body just as quickly as he would when leaping through time and space. Even in the shortest of times he is able to move freely. When you think about Io’s speed which exceeds the very concept of it as well as include his ability with the sword that would rival any god of war...

“He’s invincible, huh.”

“Yup. He is,” said Renko as she nodded with pride which was then followed by a gentle smile that broke out on her face.

“He’s still a kid, though, Even though he really likes to act smug. He went on about how ‘this woman who saw the fight firsthand has earned the right to lay her hands on the corpse,’ and so forced me to make him his Raven Artifact. He was technically my savior though so I did do my best. I used all the skills I had and my blood, sweat and tears for whatever I didn’t to make it and ended up making ‘Fenris Wolf,’ ” said the researcher, her eyes burning with resolve.

“ ‘Fenris Wolf’ is... Uhn-uhn, Io-kun is my dream. I believe in him. I believe that as Io Kagihara is now that he would not lose to anyone!” stated Renko. A refreshingly clear smile coming over her face and within it one could see the deep emotions behind it. Absolute trust in one’s skills as well as in the person using them could be found there.

“That’s true. I cannot even imagine Io-san losing. Right, Iuli?” As Yukiha looked to her side she found Iuli collapsing onto his hands and knees. He was in possession of a dark secret.

“Iu-Iuli? What’s wrong?” Yukiha asked Iuli but he was unable to answer at all. His feelings of guilt and self-condemnation seemed to almost be crushing him.

“What do I do? I ended up beating the crap out of him!” Iuli told himself in his mind. Though Io was someone many people regarded as invincible and as someone that could never lose he had already defeated him. What’s more he did it with just a single punch. He hit him so completely that even his Artifact got damaged. For Renko whose eyes sparkled with absolute trust as she told stories about Io Iuli could not bring himself to tell her that he was able to knock him out with a single punch.

“I just thought he was a cocky brat!” Iuli thought to himself, His image of Io having changed after hearing Renko’s story. He seemed like a nicer guy than he thought… as well as a little cool. Of course, he did not regret stopping him after he was ordered to kill Yukiha but when he thought about how he pulverized Renko Minamoro’s dreams and ideals he could not help but feel sorry, If the shock from what happened rendered him unable to stay on as a member of Seventh Heaven. As Iuli was trembling with fear another guest came into the research room. Renko then started typing away at her keyboard and granting permission to the new guest to enter. The one to then appear from the door was none other than Io Kagihara.

“Io-kun, welcome. I’ve been waiting for you,” said Renko as she gave Io a friendly greeting. Though Yukiha’s and Io’s families were close Yukiha always spoke formally around him but Renko’s attitude was the very definition of the word “frank.”

“It looks like you are done repairing it. Then… Hm?” As Io spoke listlessly and without expression on his face he then cut himself short and noticed that Iuli and Yukiha were in the room as well. Yukiha gave a light nod to him while Iuli:

“Y-Y-Y-Yo,” said Iuli as he gave him an awkward greeting. Iuli could not help but feel uncomfortable. He had defeated him the other day and what’s more just heard Renko talk about him so he was just at a loss at how to interact with him.

“I-It’s been a while, Shorty… Er, no, I mean, uh… I-Io…san?” Io made no reply whatsoever and the room was left silent. He made a single glance at Iuli and then passed by him without saying a word. Io then grabbed “Fenris Wolf” in the corner of the room and then quickly headed to the exit.

“Feel free to call me shorty,” said Io in passing, vanishing from the room. Though his back was already small it only grew smaller as he was leaving.

The young boy walked down the long carpeted hallway with his pitch-black long sword resting on his shoulder. He was short and his body was small. Judging by his face he looked infantile however the look he had in his eyes were exceptionally bad. He wore a long black coat with sleeves that did not pass his wrists which was proof that he was a member of Seventh Heaven which fluttered as he walked on. Such was Io Kagihara, the youngest member to ever join Seventh Heaven in all its history as well as the one known as “The Gorger.”

“I thought it would be,” he thought to himself, bewildered.

“I thought it would be more dramatic.” It was the first time he had ever tasted defeat... And to someone who was far stronger than him. Such a truth made him, he who had absolute confidence, have doubts about himself.

“I thought my loss... Was going to be more dramatic.” Ever since Io Kagihara was born he never once knew defeat. He was born into a prestigious family of mages and his father had him join a school for gifted children so as to have him focus on becoming stronger. Be it either humans or, of course, Magic Beings he did not lose once. Throughout his life people have sung his praises for being talented and being the best. That said, however, he lost just the other day, both decisively and completely.

“Iuli Asagami.” Such was the name his opponent gave him. To say that he did not let his guard down would be a lie. He was a boy he never heard of before and he did not sense an aura from him that strong individuals tended to exhibit. Io just thought him a reckless fool and if

he was to name what he did it would be that he underestimated him. The result then was a crushing defeat. He was defeated with a single punch. It was as though he meant to pick up a cold cup, expecting to drink cold water, but found himself drinking scalding hot water instead. That said, however, he did not think that such was the cause of his defeat. There was a clear difference in strength between him and Iuli Asagami. After that one attack he could at least tell that much. He was the first opponent he faced who was superior to himself.

“But in spite of that,” he thought, “I... did not feel anything.” He did not feel the bitterness of defeat, nor frustration or humiliation. Even though he just met the one who had defeated him he did not feel rage in his heart or even shame. He felt as though he were a lull at a lake with no breeze. It was the first defeat he had ever had in his entire life and yet it did not stir his heart in the slightest. Such was the truth that made him have doubts.

“I’m coming in,” said Io frankly as he kicked the heavy door open as though trying to break it down.

“Though this academy is large you are probably the only student I have who would make such a violent entrance into the headmaster’s room,” said the master of the room as she looked on peacefully at her guest.

“Io-kun, when you enter a room be sure to knock, won’t you,” said Himitsu Crowley, the headmaster of Seishun Academy as well as captain of the Gouma Knight Squad. Sitting in a lavish chair and smiling lightly.

“Just what would you do if I happened to be in the middle of changing just now?”

“I have no interest in your body whatsoever.”

“My, my, how harsh. Despite how I may look I do look quite amazing naked, you know.”

“I don’t even want to imagine you naked,” said Io as he plunked himself down onto the couch in the middle of the room. Himitsu then stood up from her seat and headed to a table with a tea set atop it.

“Would you like anything to drink?”

“Coffee milk.”

“Unfortunately all I have is regular coffee.”

“Then water will do.” Himitsu then poured mineral water into an expensive looking glass and then placed it right in front of Io. Himitsu then poured herself a glass of tea and sat so they were looking at each other face to face.

“I see you are back to carrying ‘Fenris Wolf’ with you again,” commented Himitsu as she noticed the long sword leaning against the sofa.

“Have you ever considered finally letting a specialist look at it? Renko Minamori is certainly skilled but she is still young. I am sure she pales in comparison to our elite members. The original form of her Artifact being this large is proof enough of that, I believe.”

“It doesn’t bother me at all. I like it this way. She has better taste than your researchers do,” replied Io proudly to which Himitsu shrugged her shoulders in resignation.

“Now then, since you have taken time out of your busy schedule to come here why don’t we play a game? Would you like to play cards? Perhaps chess? Shoug-”

“Get to the point already,” Io interrupted. His voice tinged with irritation.

“You’re the one who called me here, weren’t you? Just tell me what it is already.”

“It’s nothing really. I did not have any particular business with you. I was just a little bored so I decided to call you,” said Himitsu nonchalantly. The instant Io heard this the pressure in his gaze increased. In response she remained unfazed and gave him a peaceful smile before continuing.

“If anything, though, I thought it was you who had business with me.” Io remained silent. He then gave a small click of his tongue as her attitude of seeing through everything, which was her normal attitude to begin with, seemed all the more unpleasant to him today.

“Himitsu Crowley. Just who is he?” asked Io.

“And by who... You mean?”

“I’m talking about Iuli Asagami.”

“Aah, Iuli-kun. Did something happen with him? It’s rare for you to take an interest in a student like thi-“

“Do not play coy,” said Io as though he were cutting through her words.

“We are talking about you here, you who likes to peek inside people. I’m sure you’ve already finished ‘reading’ him, haven’t you? As poor of taste as it is you can do it with that tell-all book of yours.” Himitsu Crowley was holder of the seventh seat in Seventh Heaven as well as holder of the title “The Disobeyer.” The name of her Raven Artifact was “Matryoshka” which was an all-knowing Artifact that allowed her to “read” anything in the universe. Its activated form was that of a single volume book and inside it had “everything” she wanted to know about. Be it secret dealings, the past, history, lies, truths, a person’s heart,

darkness, or secrets she was able to uncover information about everything and anything.

All of it was written inside it as though it were a story. From Himitsu Crowley's godlike perspective she would read that story in the third person. Its range was limited but if its scope was that of the entire academy then she would be able to learn all there is with ease. There is not one thing that goes on in the academy that she does not know about.

"It does feel rather strange calling it a tell-all book." No matter the insults Io threw her way her smile did not falter in the slightest.

"You're right, I will stop playing coy. Io-kun, I have already 'read' into the fight you had with Iuli Asagami. Just as it was written the fight was over in an instant. Even from how it was described it truly was anti-climactic." To this Io said nothing and remained silent.

"When you confidently said 'show me that you can last at least two seconds,' and was utterly defeated in the blink of an eye I thought it was some sort of jok—" It all happened in a flash. In the very instant she was about to finish her statement Himitsu found a blade to her throat. She could feel the cold of the long sword pressing against her carotid artery.

"I see you're as talkative a woman as ever. If I slit your pharynx do you think you would talk less?" said Io with a horrifyingly cold look in his eyes as he gripped the handle of "Fenris Wolf."

"I see your draw speed is as impressive as ever. You truly are as fast as god. I feel as though I am standing still compared to you."

"Forgive me for speaking inappropriately," spoke Himitsu, apologizing. Once Io had withdrawn his sword Himitsu then breathed a sigh of relief.

“Honestly, you really must mend that habit of drawing your sword first before your mouth, Io-kun.”

“It’s faster than my mouth. Especially with someone as talkative as you,” answered Io with irreverent sarcasm.

“Just who is he?” Io asked her again.

“As you know I suffered a miserable defeat against him. I misjudged him, thinking that he was inferior to me, and lost consciousness in a single strike. That was the first time... I had experienced anything like that,” said Io. His gaze now falling to “Fenris Wolf” that he held in his hand.

“Up until now the strongest opponent I had ever faced was a Witch by the name of Rifosti who was used as the base for my Artifact. However, Iuli Asagami does not even compare to that Witch. The very idea of comparing the two of them just seems so absurd he is that strong. Well beyond me and as I am now,” After hearing this Himitsu fell silent for a short while before speaking in a dignified tone.

“As far as he is concerned... I think just thinking about him is a waste of time.”

“What was that?”

“To begin with the idea of trying to measure his strength is a mistake. Our standards are too different in the first place. Ah, or no, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that our plans were different,” said Himitsu as she let out an unintentional chuckle as though what she had just said were something amusing. Once finished she had then changed the subject and brightened her tone.

“Io-kun, have you ever played pachinko?” asked Himitsu to which Io could not help but narrow her eyes at her.

“Of course I haven’t. I am only 13, you know?”

“I myself have only been told about it as well.” Just as he was about to think of cutting her down for bringing up this nonsense he noticed the look in her eyes was unpleasantly serious and so stayed his hand.

“What is needed to win pachinko is not luck. What is needed to increase one’s chances of winning is by doing an elaborate investigation of it first.” In pachinko it is already decided that one will either win or lose when they play. Before one even sits in front of it the match has already begun. If one sits in front of a losing machine then winning is close to impossible.

“Pachinko professionals, or more commonly known as ‘pachinko pros,’ do everything they can so as to win it all. Early in the morning they: line up for the game, write down notes in their journal, create a network with comrades so as to gather information making them truly industrious. To them it is not just a game to play for fun,” said Himitsu, pausing, but then continuing her story.

“For the people who come for pachinko it is not for the passionate pursuit of knowledge. There are many players who just play without thinking at all. Between people like those and the pachinko pros the chances of winning is far greater for one than it is the other.” Just as she said this she then went on to say:

“Now then, Io-kun,” she said as she was about to ask him a question, “between these two who would in?”

“I do not understand the point of this question. You just said that the pachinko pros had a better chance, didn’t you?”

“That is exactly right. The ones who come to win are the pachinko pros. For the ones who do not expend the effort to figure out how to win there should be no way for them to beat the ones who do... However, in actuality, it is not as simple as winning and losing. Reason being is because there are many who play who are not even attached to the idea of winning. It is like the feeling you have when you go to the game center. I am sure there are many who come just to kill some time.” To this Io said nothing.

“If you think of pachinko as a match for a commoner to sit at a losing pachinko machine without even thinking, doing nothing more than waste his time and money, one would think him part of the losing group I am sure. However, if one was to think about it again, if one became upset over a game of pachinko one could also say that person was a loser in life.” Again, Io said nothing.

“To be more precise, this was nothing more than a sense of purpose there is no such thing as superior or inferior between you two. Such things vary from person to person, after all.”

“Just what have you been talking about this past while?”

“As I said: a sense of purpose,” she repeated.

“Senses of purpose as well as giving meaning to a loss or win are greatly intertwined. To people who want to win at pachinko to then lose would be a confirmation of their loss. However, for people who just want to kill time, even if they end up losing, they do not think it a loss at all. Now then, allow me to return to what we were discussing, Io-kun.” What Himitsu said next was with a peaceful gaze but how she said it was incredibly strong and clear.

“You have not lost to Iuli Asagami.”

“What are you talking about?” replied Io, failing to understand her meaning. To him he most certainly lost. He was defeated with a single blow and lost consciousness. If that was not a loss then just what would one call it?

“Io-kun, you have accepted that you have lost, right? However your heart just does not understand it. No matter how much you accept it your heart doesn’t understand it. Am I wrong?” To this, Io said nothing.

“Earlier you were truly quick in declaring that you lost and that he was stronger than you. That is proof enough. You did not accept your loss because of your being someone of high caliber but because you did not feel that you lost, right?” She had seen right through him. Feelings within his heart of having doubts when he had none before when it came to his fight with Iuli Asagami, she had seen through all of it.

“Io-kun, for what reason do you fight?”

“For what reason, you ask?” It was a question that he hated more than anything in the entire world.

“There is no need for a reason in a fight.” Io felt nothing but disdain for those who gave a reason to fighting. They were like those people who put a price on a piece of art. He felt that such an act degraded it and that it was inelegant. There is no other value to fighting. There is no reason for it to begin with. Just seeking it is a fight between life and death. In this rotten world just what was there if not fighting?

“That is right, that is what makes you you, Io Kagihara.” It was the answer she had expected but she had a smile of satisfaction on her face all the same.

“When you fight you have no reason for it. After coming this far you understand now, don’t you? That you did not lose to Iuli Asagami. You did not lose because you did not fight for the sake of winning,” she said again, denying his loss.

“To Io Kagihara it is not an issue of ‘win or lose’ but of ‘good or bad.’ Win or lose does not exist to you.” A good fight or a bad fight. That was all that Io needed.

“If I was to equate it to something... Let me see. To you a ‘fight’ is like a fruit. You go about completely devouring it for the sake of your own enjoyment. Like a starving beast you would just persistently go about devouring it.” Would a meal have a winner or a loser? Of course it wouldn’t. One eats because they are hungry. One eats something because it is delicious. Within that was a simple potential desire.

“You get depressed when you lose. You get mad. You discovered that you are small fish in a created pond and that you want to reach greater heights. You have an interest in the one who defeated you. A rival that sets your blood aflame, Jealousy towards an irrational strength, your humiliation gives way to burning anger... Such human-like qualities are unlike you, Io-kun. For you to covet human emotions is a far too presumptuous thing to do. All you have to do is devour the feast that is battle, right before your eyes.” Himitsu Crowley then went on to tell the 13-year-old boy what his true nature was that was sleeping within him.

“You are but a beast. Just feel free to run wild and become the king of the beasts.” The boy did not say anything. All he did was show a ghastly smile that indicated his thirst for carnage.

In the few hours that Io Kagihara left yet another guest came to the headmaster's room. It was an older man. He was tall and had a slender figure that looked so frail that he gave the impression that he would collapse at the slightest breeze. Though his gaze was sharp, he wore silver-rimmed glasses so as to mitigate the bad look in his eyes. As for his hair it was long and simply slicked back. Judging by the ordered look about him one could tell that he was of a higher class. He then sat on the couch in the middle of the room and proceeded to play chess with Himitsu Crowley.

"It looks as though our foolish son was here," said the man as he moved his knight on the chess board. His tone making one think that he were gentle, well-mannered man.

"Yes," said Himitsu simply as she then moved her rook in response to his move.

"Now that I think about it is it true that Io-kun does not play chess? What with him being your son I would have thought he would have been blessed with the talent for it."

"Io-kun does not like board games. I tried to recommend it to him but he refused saying, 'the difference in strength between enemies and allies is completely the same. Just where would you find a fight where your opponents made a single move a turn at a time?'"

"It is just like him."

"As for myself I do enjoy looking down from above as I am now however Io cannot help but think he would rather kill himself than do such a thing. Truly, I just do not know in what ways we are similar," Himitsu went on to say in a low, placid voice to which the man let a gentle smile show on his face. Teio Kagihara. As the head of the

Kagihara family he was Io's biological father. Judging from his gentle demeanor there was probably no one who could imagine such a thing to be true but he was one who held a position so high that one could call him god and wouldn't be wrong.

The Kagihara family is a family of mages that, throughout its history, has had a deep connection with the magic races. Its history aside, they also have spread their roots deep into the economic and political aspects of the country which has won them an enormous amount of wealth as well as the creation of the "Kagihara Group." Naturally, with such being the case, the group's leader, Teio Kagihara, not only has a strong influence in the world of mages but in political and business circles as well which affords him unprecedented authority. If it were not for him the Japanese government as well as the mage industry as a whole would not be what it is today. The organization known as the Gouma Knight Squad is yet another investment of theirs.

"So, what did you discuss with our son, Captain Crowley?"

"Nothing in particular, I was just teaching him a little. I do feel that his being unattached to the idea of winning or losing will allow him to become more aware of himself in time," said Himitsu, regardless of the fact that she was Io's biological mother. Capable of speaking in such a way to Teio because she knew she did not have to be reserved around him. Sure enough he showed no signs of taking offense and nodded meekly.

"Winning or losing, hm... Something like that has nothing to do with Io, doesn't it."

"For all I know Io-kun might have become the highest-ranking member of the Knight Squad with just his fighting prowess alone. Yet the reason I let him have the third seat in the first place was not due to the fact he is

indifferent to winning or losing but because of his indifference to life and death as well. Of course, he is indifferent to the order of the seats so it has been quite troublesome, admittedly," said Himitsu as she continued on with a bitter smile on her face.



“The holder of the first seat, ‘The Winner’ has two credos which lends to his credo of ‘victorious supremacy’. One is ‘the one who wins first is strong’ and the other is ‘it is not the strong who win; it is the one who won that is strong. Simply put he is one that is particular about ‘victory’ and, in a way, contrasts with Io-kun,” stated Himitsu as she continued on.

“Next is the woman who holds the second seat, ‘The Fugitive,’ who also has her own credos. I believe she said one of them was ‘last one standing is the winner.’ Another hers she likes to say a lot is, ‘in a world where it’s dog eat dog whether you run away or lose it’s the one that survives that’s the strongest.’” Such were the first and second seats. Based on ability neither of them was all that different from Io.

However, when the ideas of “the results of the battle” are taken into account it is clear he falls short of them. As Io had no attachment to the idea of “victory,” from the aspect of a soldier, he was far from reliable. In so hearing this Teio let out a sigh as though he were touched.

“For everyone strength is holding true to one’s ideals it would seem,” said Teio placidly as his gaze then shifted to the side where his cane that he used to come to the sofa stood.

“As you know I have this weak, frail body. If not for my cane I would not be able to walk to my all that well. Such is why I feel envious at times, of those that people call, ‘strong.’” Himitsu’s eyes then narrowed ever so slightly. In her heart she could not help but feel appalled at what he just said.

“Such a liar.” It was true that Teio Kagihara, when it came to combat, had close to no combat skills. Though born into a prestigious family he had no talent with mana and what’s more was born with bad legs. He did not even have the physical strength to do even the most ordinary of things.

“He sits at the very top of the prestigious Kagihara Family, a family of mages, even though he, himself, has none of the qualities of a mage,” Himitsu thought to herself. It was quite an accomplishment but quite strange as well. If Io was one with the greatest talent Teio was one born with an unfortunate lack of it? In a house wrought with trickery just how does a man with no skills as a fighter survive? Just what wiles did he have to employ in order to wind up at the very top? As Himitsu thought of this she could not imagine just how he did it. Just who could call such a man “weak”?

“Teio-san,” said Himitsu as a question popped into her mind, “what is strength to you?”

“That is a difficult question,” replied Teio. For a short while Teio acted as though he were thinking long and hard about something until he slowly opened his mouth and said,

“I doubt it is the ‘be all, end all’ but for me but I believe ‘authority’ is one’s strength.”

“Authority?”

“Perhaps the idea of authority does not make for the most positive image however authority is, in other words, one’s sufficiency in human relations and nothing more. As long as people are who they are they will not be able to go by avoiding interacting with others. As someone who leads an organization you understand what I mean, don’t you? Be it either popularity, wealth, information networks or connections the one who stands above all these sorts of human relations I believe is the definition of ‘strength,’ ” said the man who had no power and could not even be considered a mage all while bearing an unwavering gleam in his eye.

“I am weak. If there was anything I could win against a dog would more than likely be the extent of my might. However right now I am in a position where I hold the fates of tens of thousands of people. For example, I could even crush this academy if I so ordered it. Is that not what power is? Of course, I would not do such a thing, obviously,” added Teio.

“I knew it... So that is his true nature,” thought Himitsu, now certain. Teio Kagihara did not feel envious of others in the slightest. Though he admits that he is weak he also does not feel ashamed of it either. His combat abilities were all due to his own idea of “strength” for which he felt confident and proud about.

“They truly are not similar at all,” thought Himitsu when he thought of her child and his father. One might even say he is the complete opposite of their son who is fascinated by combat.

“In that regard Io is lacking many things. That child is my greatest masterpiece while at the same time is my greatest failure. It was due to my teaching him too much about what I didn’t have that I was not able to teach him about anything else.”

“You do not have to speak of your son in that way.”

“I say it because he is my son. His standing on the battlefield and bearing the brunt of it is a barbaric act of a lowly man, after all. It is not what one should do if he wishes to become a leader. In time he will be one to bear the full weight of the Kagihara name and it would be troublesome if he did not learn more beyond the ways of combat. Now, that is checkmate.” At the same time Teio had finished speaking he had moved his queen. Himitsu then raised both her hands up to show that she was surrendering.

“There is nothing I can do. I have been defeated.” Teio then quietly stood up from the sofa and went to get a refill on his drink.

“Captain Crowley, as usual your skills are just superb. This was a truly satisfying game. Besides you there is no one else who could lose this well. That was a marvelous game of chess.”

“Nothing would come of beating our sponsor in a game, after all.”

“So you are one who is not attached to the idea of winning or losing either, hm? To you I am sure that such a thing only exists as moves on a board. I can see you are aptly named when they call you ‘people user.’” From Himitsu’s perspective, while it was true that it was a game of chess she had let herself lose her being able to make it entertaining to Teio was nothing short of impressive. What’s more she did it with such ease.

“This man truly is... Hard to handle,” she thought. Hard to handle. For someone like him to say that about her who was known as the “people user” in a way was the greatest compliment he could have given her. As he went to refill his coffee cup he then went on to say this as though he were just remembering it:

“That reminds me, Captain Crowley, just what might your idea of ‘strength’ be?”

“Let me think,” replied Himitsu as she shortly mulled it over and then spoke once more:

“I have also been thinking about ‘strength’ lately, you see.” It was in this way that she then headed to her own work desk. On top was a box of cards from which she then took out five cards.

“For example, what would you think if someone got a full house in the first game of poker?” asked Himitsu as she showed her hand of two 2s and three 6s to which Teio answered without hesitation.

“One could not call it anything but lucky.”

“That’s right Lucky, with a full house one is able to contend with most hands. It is without a doubt a strong hand... Though that ultimately depends on who it is they are facing.” Unlike mahjong poker is not just about having a strong hand. If that was all it was the game would not go anywhere. Regardless of how strong one’s hand is if the opponent surrenders then one could not ask for anything better. If one does not exhibit strength in their cards then the game will be over for them.

“If one gets a full house in the first hand there is not much one can do about it. If the person does not ask to change any cards then the first thing his opponents might do is consider folding. That said, however, if one leaves three cards as is and changes two of them then that would be putting your good fortune to waste. If your opponents see that your once powerful hand is no more then you will be splitting your chances of winning in half,” said Himitsu as she let her full house fall to the ground scattered.

“Now then, what is a truly strong hand?” asked Himitsu as though what she was doing was staged as she then once again drew another five cards from the deck. This time it was 2, 7, Jack, 4 and a King. Both their numbers and suits were all over the place. It was a useless hand.

“With a useless hand like that I would ask for a brand new one. Naturally I am sure my opponents would take me on and without any worry whatsoever. To ask for a brand new hand would be to throw the game. The only ones who would do such a thing would be those who leave everything up to luck,” answered Teio. Matching her actions with

his words Himitsu then rid herself of the weak hand she drew and drew five new cards.

“What would you think then... if that person drew the strongest hand?” In poker that would be a royal straight flush, an ace, king, queen, jack and 10 of spades. In Himitsu’s hand were exactly those five cards.

“It would be the most unnatural bout of good luck one could receive and no one would see it coming. Going from such a weak hand and then a royal straight flush would be like one decapitating an enemy in a single strike with an unseen blade. That would be the strongest play I could think of. That would be a truly fearsome ‘strength’ one could have.”

From going from the weakest to the strongest, That is the true essence of strength. If one was to equate it to something it would be if someone who wasn’t blessed with any talent whatsoever to suddenly awaken into becoming the strongest existence in the entire world. As Himitsu held the strongest hand one could have she let a calm smile come over her face.

Walking by on his own Iuli found his dorm dyed in the colors of dusk. With Yukiha needing to have another detailed check-up he had been chased out of the laboratory. He would have been happy to wait but a detailed check-up meant that she would have to take off her clothes, which was apparently necessary for “many reasons,” and with Iuli being a man he was forced to leave.

“Damn, I wonder what they’re doing?” thought Iuli, pondering. As he let his imagination run wild he could not help but think of naughty things. He learned that one needed to know every inch of the wielder so as to engineer an Artifact for them but, thinking back on how Yukiha showered like she did, those two may very well be doing something

extreme for all he knew. It was then that a thought dawned on him as though god himself came to him.

“Wait a sec... if that’s so, then... If I become an Artifact Creator... Will I be able to get girls to strip, too?!”

“Nii-sama, zip your mouth.” After hearing a familiar voice Iuli had come back to his senses. Once he raised his head he found that Seria was right at the entrance to the boy’s dorm. In her one hand were rolls of toilet paper bundled together in a special veneer cover.

“Seria... Ah, you came to bring me that, huh... Thank you.”

“I do not want to give this to someone so creepy that they would pursue the path of Artifact Creator for such a horribly impure reason.”

“Don’t say that. Just what is impure about pure curiosity like mine?”

“Then what would you think if there was a doctor who studied to become a gynecologist so they could look at women’s crotches?”

“Now that would be creepy!” said Iuli as he completely refuted his earlier statement.

* * *

“I see... So Yukiha-san is off to have her Artifact tuned for her,” said Seria as she nodded her head in deep interest after being told a simple account of what happened.

“It looks as though Yukiha-san is doing her best so she can win the ranking matches again.”

“Yup.”

“Now that you mention it, what are you going to do about the ranking matches, Nii-sama?”

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“Have you decided to enter?”

“Ah, that… what are you going to do, Seria?”

“I will take part in it. Most all of the B-Rank students are required to take part in it, after all… and how do I describe it, I just read the mood and so decided to participate,” said Seria flatly as she then shrugged her shoulders. As someone who has taught much in her short life so far it seemed that she had a good idea about how to think and interact with people.

“I see, you’re B-Rank now, huh.” In the middle school section there is a limit to how many students can hold a B-Rank. Even in the high school section the situation is such that about half the students are C-Rank and cannot progress any further.

“It is nothing that great. Yukiha-san was A-Rank when she was in the middle school section and even my classmate Io-kun is already a member of Seventh Heaven.”

“I see,” replied Iuli. She was B-Rank in the middle school section. By most societal standards she would be deserving of the name “honor student.”

“So that’s what you’re basing it on, huh.”

“Yes it is,” replied Seria as she nodded without any doubt whatsoever.

“I do not intend to garner any more attention than this. Having people fuss about me when I am better than average is the most fun. With envy and jealousy to consider if I advance too far I would end up losing something.” From her looks one would call her cute but based on her calculating and philosophical personality she was not cute at all. Though

she was the age of a middle school student she was acting as though she had already caught on to something.

“I guess she’s got no choice, huh.” Asagami Seria’s “true” strength was not something that could be encapsulated with the term “honor student.” If she revealed her true strength, as well as what she really was, her life at the academy would be over in an instant. In the end she probably prioritized position over status as well as social strengths over physical strengths. Iuli, again, was one that wielded a strength that went well beyond human comprehension. However, on a different level, he does not think of hiding that power at all. Though he was not planning to openly show it off but, if people end up finding about his power, he would not mind either way.

He hated thinking about “pointless” things like having to hide it or not hide it. In Seria’s case, however, it was different.

When the two of them along with Julius were together during their time when they were wanderers he admired his master Julirs. He felt that from the bottom of his heart that his free way of living was just the coolest. However, the person that Seria admired the most was-

“Nii-sama?”

“Ah, sorry, I was just thinking of something for a sec there.”

“Thinking? That’s a strange notion. You thinking, I mean.”

“Well even I think of stuff, too, you know!”

“My, so that is how it is. I thought you were just someone who lived by your conditioned reflexes.” What Seria was saying was quite rude but Iuli found he could not really talk back to her so was forced to stay silent. After taking a breath, Iuli went on to say:

“Yeah, you’re right. My little sis is B-Rank and her big brother is D-Rank. It’s really uncool, huh,” murmured Iuli.

“All right, I’ve decided. Seria, I’m gonna do the ranking matches, too.” Upon hearing this Seria looked on at him in surprise.

“Sometimes Onii-chan needs to show you his cool side, too.”

In a corner room of the girl’s dorm at Seishun Academy one will be able to find her room. Though not as famous as the Kagihara family the Kudoin family was just as prestigious as mage families went. Yukiha, who is an heiress to that family, just entered her dorm and found herself confronted with the greatest reception. That said, however, as she was not one for excessive preferential treatment she lived in the same dorm as the normal students.

“Yaho, Yukiha-chaaan… Are you still awake?” Renko Minamori had called her just as the day had changed. She had apparently discovered what was wrong with “Diamond Dust.”

“That was rather fast,” commented Yukiha. It had not even been a few hours since she had performed her checkup after school.

“I just thought you were busy with the ranking matches coming up and all so I figured I’d do my best to get it done superfast.”

“Minamori-senpai…”

“More like, to be honest, it wasn’t as big of a problem as I thought so I ended up getting done quicker than I thought is all.”

“Not as big of a problem? Why? Minamori-senpai, in the end, just what was the cause?”

“Well you see… to put it simply you have too much mana.”

“Too much... mana?”

“From what I saw in your checkup I was really surprised too. Yukiha-chan, your mana’s gone up since your last checkup. That and it’s gotten to a pretty high level, too.” Yukiha was at a loss for words.

“It was just an issue of the Artifact being unable to handle you. It’s a clear case of you overloading it with your mana. It’s because you infused it with mana beyond it was set to receive so it got sluggish.”

Artifacts require detailed settings so as to be used to their fullest extent. Compared to other researchers Renko Minamori’s settings were even more detailed than that. She would go about going beyond conventional search parameters so as to provide the user with the most optimal Artifact. She would go about using any device she felt was necessary while at the same time go about removing all she felt was unnecessary. The same could be said for “Diamond Dust’s” settings. Renko had set it so it was right at Yukiha’s limits and a perfect fit for her. So when the amount of mana given to it changes it is inevitable that there would be a lag.

“I really expanded its capacity and reset it for your new mana levels so I don’t think you’ll have any problems anymore so you can come pick it up tomorrow if you like.”

“I will...”

“But you know, mana doesn’t normally skyrocket like this. Yukiha-chan, can you think of anything that could have caused this?”

“No. I cannot think of any,” said Yukiha frankly before hanging up the phone. She then stood by her window and looked outside. Today was a night with no moon or stars. Only darkness covering everything the eye could see.

“I will not lose,” said Yukiha as she brought her right fist to her chest.

“I cannot afford to lose,” she went on as she unconsciously spoke of her resolve that then disappeared with the night wind. In the end just what this resolve was in regards to? In the end not even Yukiha herself knew.

Humans and Magic Beings, Men and women, the strong and the weak, the users and the used, As all of these thoughts were swirling together in her mind the summer ranking matches were about to begin.